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UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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PhD Thesis

**Submitted for the qualification of PhD in Creative and Critical
Practice**

Thesis Title:

**Re-evaluating Creativity in Documentary Filmmaking, Creative
Analysis and Creative Constraints**

School of Media, Film and Music, March 2018

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree.

Signed.....Date.....

F. Sobron

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Abstract

This thesis presents an evaluation of creativity in documentary films through practice and critical theory. It argues for a more prominent consideration of the creative input in the production of documentary films, which has been neglected in the field, and often approached indirectly, coded as form, style or authorship. It employs creative practice as a mode of enquiry and explores scholarly criticism and theory from a practitioner's perspective. Its written part is structured in three chapters: the first looks into realities and myths of creativity through the lens of the cognitive sciences, and elaborates on their findings' usefulness to documentary film as creative analysis; the second explores the influence of documentary critical theory, expectations created of the film mode and practitioners' approaches in the representation of reality; the third engages in documentary film as creative analysis, seeing films as creative negotiations of representational constraints.

The thesis borrows from cognitive science and psychology ideas, methods and vocabulary for a critical creative analysis. It develops the analysis with attention to creative development and the problematisation of the film mode. Central to the proposed conceptual shift is the idea of 'creative constraints' as a useful frame for creativity. Building on ideas proposed by Jon Elster and Thomas Elsaesser, the thesis discusses the filmmaker's choice and acceptance of self-

imposed creative constraints to structure their creative challenge, giving defining character to authorial approach and film results.

The idea of creatively constraining a film and analysis of its creative development are put into practice in three experimental films, which form the practical part of the research. Each film was produced with a set of predetermined constraints in order to evaluate their consequences on the films' forms and narrative, making practice integral to the enquiry. The first film, *Mechanising the Catch*, documents the arrival and processing of a fish catch at a port. The most obvious obstruction imposed on its production was to make use of social media video, specifically the one with the most extreme format impositions, Vine.co. For the second, *Filling the Gaps*, the most relevant creative constraint was to indirectly, through narrative development, call attention to the intervention of the spectator's imagination in the construction of a documentary film. It explores the making of Albrecht Dürer's 1515 rhinoceros engraving and enacts parallels to Dürer's methods. The third, *Loullabelle's Café*, explores natural constraints like access and ethics in the production of a documentary film. The film contains fictional sequences complemented with a documentary.

The thesis mobilises cognitive science's conceptual tools for demystifying creativity, suggesting parallels in documentary whereby the creative demands of the film mode are made visible. Together with the idea of self-imposed creative constraints, this leads to a reappraisal and re-evaluation of the balance

of creativity in a documentary. It is a reminder of the fundamental intervention of creative input in documentary film in two aspects, creative interpretation and creative approach. The thesis proposes looking at documentaries as creative challenges to the use of the film media to represent the real, mediation and other constraints, and suggests each director's instantiation of a documentary handles these differently. In line with these ideas and supplementing existing definitions, the thesis offers a definition of documentary by reference to creative constraints.

Introduction

This thesis foregrounds creativity as one of the defining characteristics of documentary and adopts an original approach to analysis. It diverts the focus of analysis from formal and filmic components towards the creative input invested in such films' conception and the process of production. To better isolate these issues, they are considered in regards to the director working alone. Arguably, creativity has been one of the main drivers of documentary making through the history of the mode, but it has seldom been directly analysed as having the same order of importance as other aspects relating to representation. Creativity has been identified with authorship and originality of style and form, but less often with conceptual development. Yet creative input is particularly important to the documentary mode because of the need for the documentary maker to establish a relationship of trust with the spectator and to put in practice approaches representing the real to suit this purpose; that is, to be convincing in establishing a believable connection between the film and the historical real.

The thesis uses creative practice as a mode of enquiry and comprises practice elements (films) and a written component (this work). The written section is in part a reflective account of the accompanying practice. It is also in part autoethnographic. Elis, Adams and Bochner define autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience”.¹ The autoethnographic is particularly evident in Chapter Three, which examines and

shares my experience creating and making the three documentary films, *Mechanising the Catch*, *Filling the Gaps* and *Loulabelle's Café*. I explore what I regard as the ideas, influences and creative input that shaped their final forms.

I begin here with an account of how I came to pursue this project and to explain the development of key ideas, including a central critical term for the thesis – 'creative constraint' – that shaped my thinking about documentary and the making of each of the three films. The project is a reflection on the way I make films and how I approach the creative process, coming up with ideas and shaping them into the materiality of a film. The following pages consist of a review of techniques and ideas that helped in my creative development and an analysis of their implementation. The process commences with the generation of ideas, for which I find useful methods studied and described by cognitive scientists and psychologists, in understanding creative thinking and in helping bringing into contiguity previously disconnected thoughts and ideas. In creative terms, this means producing thinking and creative development that is original and useful.

To put this process in the context of documentary filmmaking and to give structure to the creative process, I narrow creative possibilities and challenges through the idea of creative constraints. At a time when there are no taboo themes or approaches limiting the possibilities of creativity, and with a need to focus ideas and imagination, constraints, as cognitivists suggest, are valuable if not necessary. The ideation stage is followed by the progress of production,

where selected ideas evolve to determine rhetoric and formal development. I maintain that this process can be revisited backwards to analyse a film's creative input. The practice part of this thesis consists of three films, *Mechanising the Catch*, *Filling the Gaps* and *Loullabelle's Café*. They were produced following this scheme and this written exegesis elaborates the influences, theories and techniques relevant to my practice and the analysis of their creative input.

The accompanying films are not thematically related; it is the exploration of the films' conceptualisation and its relationship with their execution that connects them. The films are reflexive and a means to explore my creative practice, as well as an effort to better understand the influence of creativity in documentary filmmaking. They are in essence documentaries about documentary. The exploration benefits from my professional creative practice habits and methods, the study of documentary criticism, and pragmatic semiotics. This has led me to consider methods and ideas from different knowledge domains. Firstly, ideas and methods formulated by the cognitive sciences in the study of creativity: its identification and evaluation, dispelling creativity myths, and methodological approaches to encouraging creativity. These are considered in professional practice and reviewed in seminars and workforce training to encourage creative practice, identify areas where creativity can make a difference and improve creative input. Second, pragmatic semiotics and literary criticism intervene through the concept of 'creative constraints'; this unifies the project by observing the films' creative input and following their development to their final

forms. The films were intentionally designed to display their construction and the intervention of creative drive and imagination in making and understanding documentaries. I found this approach useful for my analysis and practice, and hope it will be of use for other practitioners wishing to reflect on personalised approaches to the analysis of their practices.

The ideation process was different for each film. *Mechanising the Catch* is purposefully simple in contents and narrative, in order to facilitate its adaptation to a social media format imposing extreme limitations on its form. *Filling the Gaps* was written to make the spectator aware of the intervention of imagination and the process of assembling the film. *Loulabelle's Café* was unplanned and unwritten, an exercise in finding a film within captured footage, one among many possible films. It is also a search for solutions to the problems arising from observational and non-intervention intentions. All films were produced with near zero budgets and, to facilitate analysis of the creative input progress I made the films on my own.

The overall aim of the thesis is to analyse the creative input of the three films, identifying what can be deemed significant in turning each production into a *documentary*, forcing a reflection on what constitutes a documentary for the author and supporting the idea of documentary films as creative products. This thesis attempts to explore when or how a production starts conforming to documentary's defining traits, what Paul Arthur calls "the practices commonly indexed as documentary".² To this end, it proposes a method of exploring

creative input in documentary films through observation of the challenges of particular constraints.

Cognitivists give constraints an important role in framing any creative challenge. We are all bound by constraints at all times and in all activities, yet documentary film practitioners choose to challenge particular constraints in particular ways. In the challenge of these constraints authors' search for and put in practice original, bespoke solutions to surmount them. Considering constraints is a way to analyse creative tasks, acknowledging limiting factors in order to challenge them. Authors like Elster³ and Elsaesser⁴ propose the idea of self-imposed constraints, with Elsaesser coining the term 'creative constraints'. Creative constraints are self-imposed and self-selected. They act as a productive mechanism encouraging creativity, focusing the creative effort and giving individual character to the resulting work. Self-constraining aims to narrow the creative focus and to avoid being overwhelmed by diversity of choice. The Dogme 95 vows of chastity or Direct Cinema's ambitions for a new form of reporting and documenting, as is discussed in chapter two, can be thought of as sets of creative constraints in the search for creative filmmaking centred on authorship in response to, or rejection of, the contemporaneous mainstream. While these are obvious examples, all creative work engages in challenging constraints, consciously or otherwise.

Cognitive scientists and psychologists have devised models of exploration useful for identifying, measuring and analysing creativity. Looking at methods

that have benefited cognitive and psychologist researchers in the study and encouragement of creativity abets a methodological exploration of creative input in the production of documentary films. This is an area of interest recently explored by authors like Catalin Brylla and Mette Kramer, like me interested in “how mental processing takes place in relation to a film”,⁵ in particular a documentary. Introducing cognitive researchers’ ideas can be interpreted as a response to screen production research ambitions. This is described by Kerrigan and McIntyre as “a creative research approach that investigates acts and contexts of creation, as well as exposing tacit and explicit demonstrations of skills, knowledge and methods of documentary practice”, an approach that “could help researchers to tease out the creative forces that are at work for documentary practitioners”.⁶

The thesis comprises three films (plus two extra films offering alternative approaches in their creative development, included in an appendix for comparison) and this written analysis. Together they attempt, as Kerrigan and McIntyre ⁷ put it, a ‘teasing out’ of the creative forces at work in my practice process and my interpretation of documentary. It is also a response to David Bell’s call for a “systematic reflection on the processes by which an artwork was produced”,⁸ and his encouragement of importing to practice-based research “background research” ⁹ methods observed in professional practice and institutions.

The complications of defining creativity and documentary.

Both creativity and documentary have proved complicated to define, and some of the problems in their study stem from this difficulty. Creativity featured prominently in early attempts to define documentary, namely John Grierson's famous definition: "Documentary, or the creative treatment of actuality, is a new art, with no such background in the story and the stage as the studio product so glibly possesses."¹⁰ The 'creative treatment of actuality' is probably the most widely recalled of documentary's definitions. The apparent simplicity of the sentence encapsulates the concerns about documentary, of special relevance to this thesis, and the acknowledgement of creativity as a major force shaping and defining documentary film. The definition reflects the internal tension that nearly every documentary has to overcome, between treating actuality creatively and ethical interpretation. The apparent contradiction between what appear to be two irreconcilable forces pulling in different directions was influentially noted by Winston,¹¹ who discusses the freedom of creative spirit and imagination versus a responsible and faithful representation of reality. Grierson never quite defined creativity and neither did Winston, maybe the most influential critic to have written about the definition in detail. Winston famously questions what would be left of actuality once treated creatively.¹² His interpretation identifies creativity and artistic legitimacy,¹³ yet the meanings of art and creativity or artistic and creative are not interchangeable, so he hardly resolves or illuminates the intervention of creativity in documentary film practice. Pairing creativity and artistic legitimacy taints creativity with ideas of art and the

artist. Historically and in popular culture these have been heavily influenced by popular imagining, notably Romantic ideals of the artist as an idiosyncratic genius inspired by muses. This portrayal was criticised by Marxist thinkers as a bourgeois construct, in particular by Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory*.¹⁴ Adorno's arguments centred around the "fetishization of the concept of genius"¹⁵ which he denounced as elitist for giving more importance to the person behind the artwork than the object itself. By contrast, cognitive scientists as well as Practice as Research (PAR) academics focus on process, and the need to consider and discuss these processes for the understanding of a work of art and in order to assess its value as research. Cognitive scientists, notably Boden,¹⁶ Kaufman and Sternberg,¹⁷ and Sawyer¹⁸ similarly criticise the Romantic lack of understanding of creativity.

Kerrigan and McIntyre revisit Grierson's definition, reconceptualising creativity and re-contextualising it with a more contemporaneous approach. As they put it: "the creative treatment of actuality' stand as the judicious foundation from which documentary communities of practice can revisit, in order to reconceptualize, the link between art, creativity and documentary practice".¹⁹ In my second chapter I return to Grierson's definition and Winston's criticism. I find the definition apt as a working one and an ideal precedent from which to revisit the link between creativity and documentary practice.

Practice as research

Desmond Bell reflects that in film studies “little critical attention [has been paid] to the generative or *producerly* activity”²⁰ of filmmaking, in contrast with the attention given to the discursive features of the texts. Bell underlines the importance of the generative activity and the need for extensive knowledge and understanding of the specific intended cultural domain and field for a film to succeed. Bell notes three points pertinent to this thesis: the need for a viable way to integrate practice with academic research; the temptation to resort to Romantic ideas of the artist, creativity, muse inspiration and mysticism; and the difficulty of accepting and understanding the results of creative practice as a performance. Bell comments on how interest in art rests in its practice: “It is because certain features of that practice puzzle us, or because the entities that enter into that practice fascinates us that we are driven to philosophical reflection about art in the first place”.²¹ Bell argues for rigorous inquiry into artistic practice and artistic works. The critical reflection in this thesis centres on the creative input into the films I make, noting its influences, character, magnitudes and consequences overall. In particular, it centres on the relationship between the forms my films ultimately adopt and the way creative input shaped them, to help with identifying what characterises them as documentaries. Following Bell’s suggestions, the thesis intends not merely to represent an “appreciation and evaluation of the ‘manifest work’” or only be concerned with “the codes and structures which film studies and other forms of

critical study treat as their object of study”.²² Rather, it intends to contextualise and understand part of its generative performance, the films’ creative input.

Like Bell, Kerrigan acknowledges the unique position of the practitioner in relation to generative performance and the research process, and the potential value of an “insider’s” position facilitating access to knowledge not reachable through the study of the author or the manifest work.²³ Likewise, Berkeley stresses the practitioner’s privileged position, with access to “plans, statements of creative intention and production documents that would not be available to a researcher looking at the finished film”.²⁴ From this position, I look into a small contextual area of creativity located between the author, her/his ideas, and the influence of documentary knowledge and criticism that, I maintain, has been less explored – among other reasons because of the complications in the conceptualisation and discussion of creativity and the difficulty of close, reliable access to its generation.

Mednick’s ideas of associative pathways and ideation contiguity²⁵ in the process of the formulation of creative ideas have been reflected upon in PAR scholarship. Introducing themes and ideas previously seldom related or unrelated, as cognitivists suggest, encourages divergent thinking and serves as further justification for drawing on cognitive methods and ideas to produce film ideas and evaluate creativity. In resonance with Mednick, Barret writes that

The juxtaposing of disparate objects and ideas has, after all, often been viewed as an intrinsic aspect of creativity. The interplay of ideas from

disparate areas of knowledge in creative arts research creates conditions for the emergence of new analogies, metaphors and models for understanding objects of enquiry.²⁶

This exegesis, like the accompanying films, is a creative exercise in terms of associative pathways, sourced from diverse knowledge domains with the aim of enlightening or modifying ideas about documentary creativity, its analysis and criticism, as associative ideation processes do. Following Mednick, this thesis, both practice and written parts, brings together different thinking from documentary theory and practice and cognitive science vocabulary and methods. It follows the challenges of creative constraints to revisit the process followed in generating and evaluating creative ideas. It reflects on creativity in documentary film. For this it looks into less frequently explored areas of documentary theorisation, namely creative input, it mines knowledge domains less frequently associated with documentary criticism, and imposes and follows predesignated constraints on film practice as a method of enquiry. There is a need for original approaches to subjects even if not all produce great advances. At the very least, trying differently is in itself a step forward. Mednick encapsulated the thinking behind the need for original approaches: “the greater the number of instances in which an individual has solved problems with given material in a certain manner the less is the likelihood of his attaining a creative solution using this material”.²⁷

Recent ideas of documentary film as performative, notably proposed by Stella Bruzzi, consider documentary films to be the result of “the negotiation of the

filmmaker and reality and at heart, a performance”.²⁸ Bruzzi’s argument acknowledges the medium’s representational constraints and sees their challenge in the author’s performance. Performativity could be seen as a creative strategy to signal to the spectator the relationship between a representation and what is represented by capturing the action that characterises the documentary film. Bruzzi’s ideas, founded on John Austin’s work on performativity, could be taken as an example of creative strategies or ideas the filmmaker implements to overcome the constraints of mediation. How documentary authors and publishers articulate their film’s relationship to the real – consisting of bespoke approaches to negotiating the unavoidable gap mediation imposes – could be interpreted and analysed as creative solutions.

In the following chapters I elaborate on the significance of looking at documentary film production through its constraints, the usefulness and value of self-imposed creative constraints, and the relevance of the latter to creativity and representation strategies. Guided by the adoption of self-imposed constraints (discussed further below) as a creative motivator, interactivity presented itself as a possible creative strategy for challenging both self-imposed and documentary’s natural constraints. In consequence, and looking for creative approaches as solutions to representation limitations, one of the films developed into an I-doc, an interactive documentary. I-doc is the generic name given to an expanding number of hybrid documentary forms that make use of the digital environment. I-docs have their conceptual antecedent in Manovich’s ideas of remediation and the database logic of media²⁹ in the digital

era, as well as early conceptions of database narratives.³⁰ Their key feature is the intervention in the narrative by the spectator, or as O'Flinn calls it, the interactant, to format the narrative as she/he navigates the compiled media on offer. In this act, the interactant is not influenced in the same measure as in a traditional edited narrative by the "complexity of narrative structures that layer meaning [...] through the poetics of the text",³¹ having to contribute selectively to the narrative structure and filling in ideas for the connection of the elements presented to her or him in the actuality database.

I-docs and the affordances of the digital probably represent the most significant challenge to shared cultural ideas about documentary, and their remediation, adaptation and transformation in the digital environment, since the invention of synchronised sound film. *Mechanising the Catch* was produced in response to the challenge of documentary's constraints and in order to observe and map a documentary adaptation to the digital and to a predetermined constraining format. Later in the thesis I elaborate the particular creative constraints applied to each film, identify and review strategies for engaging with their challenges, and reflect on their significance.

Of the three following chapters, the first explores cognitive science's methods of identifying and encouraging creativity. The chapter reviews cognitive methods of creative magnitude and processes, and suggests their usefulness in creating and writing about creativity in documentary. Similarities can be established between the domains of creativity and documentary, as they both have complex

definitions and are commonly associated with influencing models or distorting signifiers. What is understood as creative and what is understood as documentary share a problematic in the extent of their possible instantiations and the problem of succinct, universal definitions.

The central theme of the second chapter is the problematisation of documentary and the possible impact of this on creativity, observed from the practitioner's point of view. I review some of the strategies undertaken by renowned directors and documentary film movements in response to or that complement its historical problematic.

The third chapter reviews and analyses the experimental documentary films which are part of this research. I take into account cognitivists' observations about creativity, successful earlier creative strategies in documentary film representation, and the ideas of Elster and Elsaesser on creative constraints, together providing a creative practice frame in which to challenge established thinking and practice.

Throughout this authorship-focused thesis, the terms film and video are used interchangeably because in essence digital video recording is comprised of the know-how recognised as filmmaking. As the thesis looks in detail at a particular aspect of practice, creative input, it ventures less frequently into issues of spectatorship, but this will recur briefly at certain points.

Chapter One:

Cognitive sciences and their usefulness to documentary creation and analysis

In 1962 Mednick³² proposed a “definition of creative thinking in associative terms” in an attempt to “delineate the processes that underline all creative thought”.³³ Associative ideations are ways of interpreting and understanding the creative processes that are attainable by everyone. Mednick defined the creative process “as the forming of associative elements into new combinations which either meet specified requirements or are in some way useful”.³⁴ He identified influencing factors likely to increase the chance of attaining creative solutions, like the number of associations, the selective creative combination of elements, cognitive personality styles, associative hierarchies and the need for associative elements. In regards to the characteristics of associations, Mednick underlines the influence of their distance: “the more mutually remote the elements of new combination, the more creative the process of solution”.³⁵ Mednick’s suggestions resonate with the experience of the ideation, design and production of a documentary, and are useful for examining the creative processes from a film’s inception to its development.

Writers and academics in the fields of cognitive sciences and the arts have noted the relevance of creative constraints in the generation of creative ideas. Authors like Boden, Elster, Hiørt, Petrie, and Elsaesser reflect on the role of constraints, viewed as encouraging opportunities for finding solutions or

workarounds.³⁶ Constraints, Boden points out, are essential to creativity, and form the conceptual framing of the objective to be overcome.³⁷ Robert McKee³⁸ elaborates on the need for limitations and constraints as a focusing influence in the creative development of a film idea and script; what Weisberg³⁹ calls a kernel idea McKee calls a “controlling idea”,⁴⁰ the seed around which story development revolves. The practice section of this thesis puts these ideas to work in the ideation, production and self-reflectivity of the documentaries. The films propose idea associations from diverse knowledge domains in order to intervene and review documentary practice within a frame of creative constraints. This allows for different approaches in the interpretation of the film mode, its perceived problematic, and directors’ approaches to challenges of mediation and representation.

The problematic definition of creativity and its relevance to documentary filmmaking

I propose to look at documentaries as expressions of ideas articulated creatively. Essential to their making is the intervention of creativity at all stages of their production, turning observation and reflection into films. Creativity, like documentary, is a complex concept, difficult to succinctly define. The lack of consensus on a definition has arguably been a factor in the study of both fields. Until recently the sciences that study creativity, cognitive science and psychology, had reservations about creativity to the point of avoiding a definition.⁴¹ In documentary, creativity has been recognised in form, style or

authorial signature, and often regarded as a factor at odds with documentary's high ambitions of truth-telling and social service. But the democratisation of production means and access to publishing platforms has also meant increased creative competition for angles, approaches or strategies on new and old subjects, as well as increasing practitioner reflection about documentary. Creative input, always of key importance, is becoming even more so because of the need to stand out in a world saturated with media.

For the analysis of creative input – its nature, inspiration and the significance it may have in light of scholars' and critics' ideas about documentary – a frame or schema and vocabulary need to be put in place. In line with the ideas and models proposed by scholarship in screen production research or PAR (practice as research), I examine the ideas, creative acts and decision-making processes that shaped my films' forms. This is in contrast to the majority of formal analysis that looks into the 'manifest work', at best guessing what initially motivated it through its evident form and notes from or about the author. To aid this, this chapter succinctly reviews relevant research in cognitive science and psychology and methods developed to understand, encourage and classify creativity. Such work provides insight into the motivations of creativity and is thus valuable in giving structure to a study of the creative input of a documentary film production.

Methods for the study of creativity.

The methods reviewed in the following paragraphs are a source of inspiration in the creative industries, in research and development, as well as in administrative organisations. The methods have evolved from generalising cognitive theories like the ‘exemplary creator’ explored and criticised by Gardner,⁴² superseded by a tendency to break creativity exploration into discrete approaches, looking at personality, environment, tactics or processes. Cognitive science methods can help producing creative work and to structure an analysis of creative input in documentary filmmaking. Most of the methods are self-explanatory and can be applied to the filmmaking process.

This analysis by no means attempts to establish a parameter by which practice, including mine, can be considered more or less creative. The analysis focuses on what I consider creative acts and input in regard to the models and methods reviewed. I note this in acknowledgement that in respect of my practice whether it is creative at all could be questioned, taking into account Boden’s assertion that creativity requires both challenging new ideas and their acceptance by some relevant social group.⁴³ What is intended is an informed approach; this study does not profess the rigour of applied cognitive sciences but to borrow their frame of knowledge to give order, precision and vocabulary to my analysis.

As an illustration, I put forward Weisberg’s analysis of Picasso’s *Guernica*, in which Weisberg traces ideas and motivations that shaped the work to its final

stage, based on conclusions reached studying what he termed “fossil records”.⁴⁴ Weisberg’s fossil records comprise what Desmond Bell calls the ‘manifest work’, the final form of a work when exhibited and external documents that help in tracing what motivated the work’s form.⁴⁵ Examining a manifest work’s form can be supported by external records of the work recording the progress of inception and making, like plans, sketches or photographs. Like Weisberg’s, my model of analysis attempts to explore one step ahead of the formal evidence recorded, tracing it back to its motivation. In contrast to Weisberg’s analysis, I have the advantage of access to every development since the films’ inception. This search aims to be different yet complementary to traditional forms of media analysis evaluating what makes a film a documentary. It looks into the adequacy of film forms to transparently or accurately encapsulate instances of the historical real, ethically as well as aesthetically, or the possibility of deducing authors’ motivations solely from evident work. I propose exploring the forms’ motivations and how the author negotiates the unavoidable constraints of mediation to construct a bespoke schema or strategy for the representation of reality.

Cognitive science approaches to creativity and their possible usefulness to documentary analysis

Scientists studying creativity agree about the difficulty of defining it. Kaufman highlights to what extent scientists studying creativity omit its definition in their publications,⁴⁶ and dismisses the idea that this omission could be caused by

general agreement on a definition. The nature of the term, its aura of mystery, its classical association with muses⁴⁷ and the divine,⁴⁸ not only puts researchers off from establishing a simple working definition but, in Kaufman's opinion, from its study altogether. Documentary shares complications in regards to its definition, and similar prejudices likely deter scholars from analysing the creative input invested in documentaries. In spite of creativity being a component of probably the first and most widely recalled definition of documentary, Grierson's "creative treatment of actuality",⁴⁹ there is a deficit in the direct study of the part played by creative input, in contrast to the study of evident forms, that is, the formal aspects through which the intentions of the author can at best be deducted or guessed. In the classification and analysis of creative input, a terminology enabling its discussion is conspicuous by its absence, possibly obscuring the relationship between intention and final form and the motivation for their choice as part of a representational strategy rather than as an aesthetic choice.

Many parallels can be established between the definitions of creativity and documentary. Central to documentary studies lies the difficulty in succinctly and definitively defining what documentary is. For documentary scholars, the equivalent to cognitive scientists' complicated approach to and difficulty in isolating creativity manifests itself in a number of themes, seemingly impossible to resolve. These are debates surrounding the difficulty in reconciling concepts and aspirations like truth and truthful representation, objectivity and subjectivity, mediation substituting for historical reality, or photographic indexicality for proof.

Difficulties are not limited to forms but extend to aspects surrounding practice, like the problems of authorship, ideological influence, the unavoidable impact of the recorder's presence or human biases, and the misappropriation of documentary values for propaganda or satire. Since the turn of the twenty-first century the voices denouncing the negative influence of certain criticism have multiplied. Bruzzi criticised documentary scholarship's repeated invocation of an "idealised notion" of documentary as pure and capable of relating reality and its representation in a straightforward, unproblematic manner.⁵⁰ Trihn T. Min-Ha went further, calling the idealised film form 'totalising' – an ideal mode seemingly capable of evading issues of representation and politics, a mode of self-appointed social interest and a redeemer of those without a voice. Ultimately, she asserted that, should documentary be expected to be as described, then "documentary doesn't exist".⁵¹ Based on its ideation, scholarship has often resorted to highlighting what documentary is not or what ideally it should be.

Creativity features in existing documentary studies, albeit coded, as intervention, authorial influence or mediation, and in most cases the sole objects of criticism are style and form. Since Grierson's 'creative treatment of actuality' the creative side of documentary has always appeared subordinate to the notion of actuality, pitched against the representation of fact and pursuit of truth.⁵² Creativity has been looked at as intervention or authorship but seldom as applied ability that can be traced and analysed in terms of its motivations. Evident forms have often been read as a synecdoche of creative input when

they are but the result of it. The forms of the film record are ‘fossil evidence’ or ‘manifest work’, records of creative acts or decisions, such that it seems only logical to look into their motivations to better understand their manifestations. Specific to documentary, these ideas, acts and decisions often strive to best match the aspirations of documentary with meaningful representations of reality. Documentary makers creatively develop formal strategies to convincingly, responsibly and adequately allow spectators to link their films and events of the real. It is in this transaction that the idiosyncrasy of creativity’s significance for documentary practice resides.

An approach to documentary analysis through creative input analysis:

Models of creativity and practice

Creativity is the result of the exchange and interpretation of knowledge, a process of transformation with possibly unforeseen consequences in new, useful combinations or interpretations. Csikszentmihalyi proposed a simple schema that synthesises the influences and flow that make creative production possible, including individuals, cultural domains and fields. Fields stands for those versed in the cultural domain. All three intervene in the creative process, producing creative instances, evaluating them and fixing new proposals as the cultural deposit, the knowledges that together comprise a cultural domain. In his words, creativity is no longer seen as “the product of single individuals but of social systems making judgements about individuals’ products”.⁵³

The way I propose looking at creative input could also be mapped along other cognitive approaches to documentary criticism and to other creative practices like scriptwriting or creative writing. Brylla and Kramer,⁵⁴ Kerrigan and McIntyre,⁵⁵ and Skains⁵⁶ have proposed frameworks, models or schemas of creative development in creative practice to aid pragmatic, heuristic and interdisciplinary approaches to a cognitive analysis of creative development in practice. Their models have a common ancestor in Csikszentmihalyi's 'System Model of Creativity'.⁵⁷

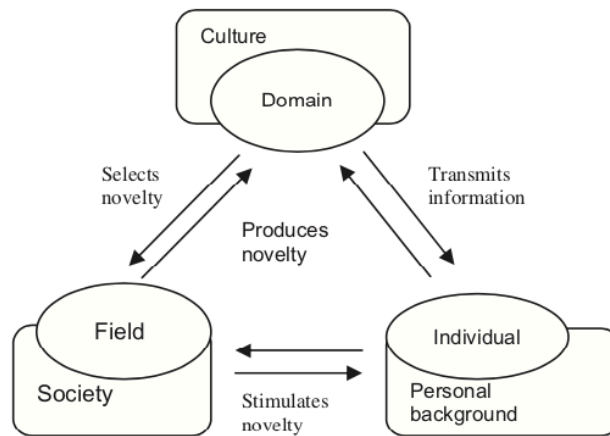


Figure 1: Csikszentmihalyi's System Model of Creativity reproduced as printed in Kerrigan and McIntyre, "The 'Creative Treatment of Actuality'".

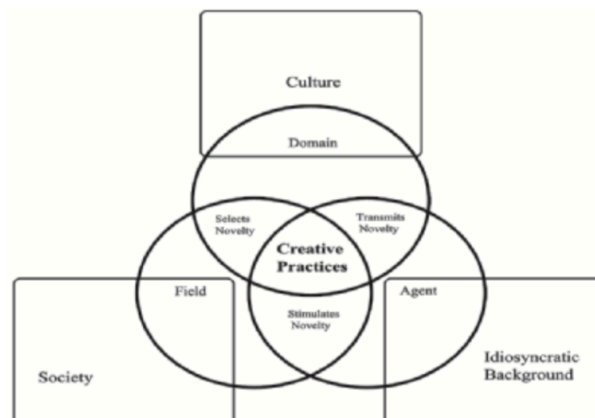


Figure 2: Kerrigan and McIntyre's revised model.

These authors offer updated versions of the model, with different complexities and focuses. Brylla and Kramer take a heuristic, pragmatic perspective, Kerrigan and McIntyre extend Csikszentmihalyi's concept to acknowledge the retro-feedbacks of collaboration, and Skains makes a comprehensive system model based on her own practice and experience of mapping the process of creation⁵⁸ and incorporating these into Fowler and Hayes' cognitive process model.⁵⁹ Csikszentmihalyi's model and Kerrigan and McIntyre's updated model best contribute to map my area of exploration. The extent of this authorship-focused study is not as wide as other creative system models. It focuses on the process between the individual or agent (me as producer/creator) and interactions, mainly with knowledge domains (film, documentary, cognitive sciences, pragmatic semiotics and literary criticism, in the form of constraints). This process comprises the initiation of ideas for the development of a documentary film, to noting and recalling smaller ideas, decisions or acts of influence in the creative development process and a film's final form.

In the diagram, the object of this study is limited between the agent receiving knowledge and the cultural domain(s). The flow considers the agent's personal background, e.g. cultural milieu, know-how, ability or knowledge, and how these influence creative production. It looks at their eventual re-composition or transformation into, ideally, useful new formulations of knowledge. This would later, on publication, be made available to the field for evaluation. External to the agent, proposals are validated and accepted or rejected by the broader

cultural field. The field's response determines the impact on the cultural domain. Some of the accompanying films are in the process of being submitted to peer-reviewed publications and film festivals, and their reception should begin to produce feedback from cultural fields, in addition to the audience responses I had the chance to record. The method employed here concentrates on the imagining and re-composition of knowledge from the main sources of influence, and on creative acts and their journey from ideas to becoming a documentary film. The accompanying films and the written reflection will be put to the field in the form of this doctoral thesis, and will be evaluated.

Identifying influences on creativity

There are two main concepts characterising theories of creativity. The first seeks to establish the scope of the creative act. Kaufman and Sternberg call these frames of reference levels, or "Categories of Creative Magnitude".⁶⁰ The second, and of more interest to those exploring their creativity or analysing creativity, considers common elements of influence, which scholars summarise as process, product, person and place. Later theories extend this to include persuasion and potential.⁶¹ These groupings of creative influences are commonly referred as the four or six Ps.

The theories scholars deem most 'objective' when considering how to understand and 'measure' creativity focus on the product. This means works like musical compositions, inventions, paintings or documentary films. Their

drawback is the lack of insight into the processes that lead to their production. This is compensated for by reliance on sketchy knowledge of the authors' personality or external documents relevant to the product. The lack of nuance and insight is especially evident when applying product-focused theories to works of lesser magnitude. Established personalities are easier to identify in their creative products, in contrast to lesser creative products where exploration through knowledge of the author is difficult. This is the case with most documentaries. However, with the exception of works from accomplished authors, most analysis of documentary, as in the work accompanying this reflection, centres on what scientists call Pro-c magnitudes, those evidence by for example professionals yet not at universal recognition level ⁶². For these, knowledge of the author in support of the analysis can be very sparse or unavailable.

Influences on creativity

Cognitivists classify the major influences according to the above-mentioned six Ps. Personality is considered an influencing factor rather than an explanation for developing creativity. A number of traits recur when studying creative individuals, some more pervasively than others. Several of these traits are present in most study domains, as Kaufman and Sternberg notice, including "intrinsic motivation, wide interest, openness to experience, and autonomy".⁶³ Obviously, every documentary transcends the personal, as each exposes its author's ideas in public. Personality, in combination with press, the author's

milieu and influences, could be contrasted to what has been considered in documentary as authorship. Cognitive science positively relates individual motivation to creativity and influence in a text's interpretation. Motivation may not necessarily be easy or possible to trace through textual analysis, but it would be difficult to imagine a creative work without a motivating creative drive. To analyse the influence of personality on documentary demands knowledge of the author; in most cases this knowledge is limited to the mediated public sphere, reflecting the author's reputation, and is most often unreliable. On work of lesser-known authors, as noted above, this can be impossible to access. 'Press', according to Kaufman and Sternberg,⁶⁴ refers to the environment a persona resides in and its conduciveness to nurturing creativity or qualities of creative character. The university and wider creative community could be identified as the press in which the films in this study were created. 'Press' is more useful than guessing personality as it can uncover aspects of motivation, knowledge, interests, environment, openness to experience and autonomy. In my final chapter I elaborate on my films' 'press', that is, the environment where they were conceived in the course of a PhD candidature, while the influences of documentary theorisation and criticism are reviewed in the next chapter.

There are two more Ps in the cognitive science approach to studying creativity of particular interest and usefulness to documentary film analysis. The first is 'persuasion'. Its premise is that creative people intentionally strive to change the way others think and that there is a likelihood that creative mavericks will influence entire domains. Neither seems strange when considered in regards to

documentaries and their makers' aims. Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Eye*, John Grierson's *Documentary Film Movement* or *Direct Cinema* were born out of their authors' ambitions to employ film and cause social effect or change, with their success forcing modifications to the domain. The limitation of persuasion is the exclusion of smaller creative acts without evident product or everyday originality that "may not be deemed creative, since [they are] largely personal",⁶⁵ yet these may be necessary steps to greater achievement. Documentaries, like all performance arts, are supposed to be made for an audience, and most intend to cause some effect on the viewer, whether artistic or socio-political, and the vast majority have their intended ideas backed by rhetorical arguments and testimony. As Donald argues, "art is an activity intended to influence the minds of an audience. It involves the deliberate construction of representations that affect how people (including the artist) view the world".⁶⁶ Documentaries may not intend to persuade, yet by their use of language, discourse and rhetoric, by definition they are unavoidably exerting some form of persuasion.

Filmmakers and scholars as varied in approach to documentary study and understanding as Nichols, Arthur or Vaughan defend the idea of understanding documentary "in relation to its viewers",⁶⁷ through constituencies of viewers⁶⁸ or audiences interpretations of documentary.⁶⁹ Semio-pragmatist Roger Odin maintains that a documentary becomes so when it is watched and understood as such.⁷⁰ Even at their more artistic or abstract, documentary films need to persuade the viewer that they are watching a documentary. On reflection, there seem to be degrees of persuasion or 'persuasivity' in documentary, evidenced

in the relocation of ideas about the issues in consideration encouraged by documentaries. Every documentary takes the spectator on a journey where previous views, knowledge or assumptions are influenced or challenged. A clear example could be *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris, 1988) where Errol Morris, a former private detective, exposes the flaws in a judicial sentence, which was reviewed in consequence. A less clear example could be *The Salt of the Earth* (Wenders, 2014), where the viewer is taken on an aesthetic journey of Salgado's photography, intended to make us evaluate the true value of the land and its peoples at a global, social and environmental scale.

The last P stands for 'potential'. Its meaning is pitched in contrast to 'persuasion', as Kaufman and Sternberg explain: it "appreciates the yet-unfulfilled possibilities and the subjective processes".⁷¹ Every documentary production is an opportunity for creativity with potential in the idea, subject, author, team and the interaction of all the factors that comprise the making of a film. Going back to 'associative pathways' and Mednick's ideas about bringing concepts apparently disconnected into 'ideation contiguity', the potential of documentaries is only limited by the imagination, a counterintuitive thought if considered in light of the insistent idea of documentary centred in the representation of factual information. *Filling the Gaps*, one of the accompanying films, portrays the development of potential Albrecht Dürer recognised in the news of a rhinoceros arriving in Europe. Dürer exploited this potential, making use of his masterful draughtsman abilities, interpreting the scant information about the animal through his power of observation and knowledge of the animal

kingdom, to imagine a plausible approximation of a rhino. The film shows a use of imagination not dissimilar to that needed to code and decode documentaries, which is the underlying theme of *Filling the Gaps*.

Similar to ‘practice as research’, creative cognitive theories emphasise the need for attention to process, the value of enquiring from within and the value of autoethnography.⁷² For the purposes of analysis, some of the most useful cognitive concepts and definitions of processes include associative processes (where insights result from the potential for originality of “remote associates”⁷³) and divergent and convergent thinking (when ideas and associations explore multiple directions or when acquiring/acquired knowledge is used to search for a “correct or conventional answer”⁷⁴).

In their search for what happens before an idea is generated, cognitive researchers consider as instrumental the association of unrelated concepts from different domains. The connections between concepts not obvious a priori can become the spark for original insights. Of special interest are those from remote domains: “Conceptual combination – bringing two different sets of information together – is often involved in creative problem solving and ideation”.⁷⁵ East and Ward describe “how original insights are more likely when two more disparate features are brought together and how connections between two concepts may be seen only at very high level of abstraction. This kind of thinking has been called ‘metaphorical logical’”.⁷⁶ Following the work of Finke et al.,⁷⁷ comparable concepts to ‘metaphorical logical’ were adopted by

researchers, including conceptual combination, conceptual expansion, creative imagery and metaphor. The exploration of concepts like these led to a model based on generating ideas by exploring together seemingly unrelated concepts in order to generate insights. Researchers named this “model of creative thought” by blending the words ‘generate’ and ‘explore’ in the portmanteau “geneptore”.⁷⁸ The ‘geneptore’ model for creative search divides the creative process into two phases, the generative phase and the exploration phase. The generative phase includes retrieval from memory, and analysis, combination and synthesis of information and thoughts designed to approximate original ideas and help drive thinking away from established paths; it creates what Finke and Ward call ‘preinventive’ structures that might seed novel ideas. The second phase explores the preinventive structures, searching for usefulness in specific purposes. Tellingly, researchers enunciating the geneptore model positively consider constraints as motivating factors for creativity.⁷⁹ The geneptore model resonates with the two cognitive steps described by Kerrigan.⁸⁰ This could be interpreted as the cycle where reflective criticism first generates preinventive structures to foster creative discovery and elaborate the generation of meaningful, original uses or interpretations in documentary practice – this is the exploration phase. This view suggests the importance of the creative effort in the transition between a documentary’s ideation process and the problematics of its practical implementation; while the first is open and agnostic, the second, documentary practice, is under the unavoidable constraints of mediation such as subjective interpretation, the presence of the camera and crew, or footage selection and editing. Applying the model to documentary making, the

‘preinvention’ process includes originality of approach and theme, and the evaluation of ideas that will be explored to generate approaches for their implementation into film forms.

Problem solving, problem finding and examples of creative analysis

In the development of cognitive theories, researchers like Flavell⁸¹ or Fogarty⁸² turned their studies to metacognitive processes, that is, to the know-how regarding when and how to use particular knowledge to approach problems. These are characterised by being tactical, incited and consciously controlled to increase the probability of success of problem solving. Problem solving and expertise-oriented theories have two broad focuses, one on the person, considering individual expertise, and the second on the process, that may explain how creative solutions to problems are generated. Researchers have named some of the strategies used in the tactical, conscious, methodical approach to encourage the production of ideas as “think backwards”, “turn the situation upside down”, “shift your perspective”, “put the problem aside” and “question assumptions”. The terms are self-explanatory and useful to approach ideas in the conception and development of documentaries.

Problem solving alone inadequately explains why creators find previously non-existent problems that can be tackled by new solutions. Cognitivists like Kaufman or Sternberg maintain that problem finding is more subjective than problem solving and is not necessarily linked to expertise. Mednick suggests

that there is a selection of creative combinations prior to the formulation of pathways and associations. When there are no criteria, as is often the case in relation to problem finding, “the task of selection in this case consists in finding relevant criteria”.⁸³ The idea of problem finding has a clear parallel in documentary filmmaking in the filmmaker’s search for documentary themes and subjects. Only so many historical real events are universal and impactful in their significance, capable of attracting and sustaining attention. More often documentaries *manufacture* interest in their themes and subjects by finding original angles on already addressed issues. Morgan Spurlock’s *Supersize Me* (2004) tackles the subject of junk food (problem finding) by adopting the angle of subjecting himself to a diet of junk food and documenting the effects on his health (problem-solving communication strategy).

Documentary films need a theme and a rhetorical exposition. The less universal a theme is, the lesser its capacity to attract attention and the more decisive becomes what it proposes. ‘Potential’ and ‘persuasion’ are concerned in the creative ‘process’. The theme or subject of a documentary (e.g. junk food), is seldom enough to call attention to its issues nor likely to warrant a comprehensive review. In contrast, warnings about what may kill you are. Most documentary themes and subjects are out there for all to approach but it is the task of the documentarist to find the angles that would make them *matter* to viewers, as they matter to the author (i.e. eat nothing but junk food for a month and show the consequences). The theme – here junk food – has potential; eating only junk food exploits that potential, developing a persuasive

proposition: eating only junk food can kill you (idea contiguity). While junk food is a topical and potentially interesting theme, things to avoid because they kill can be thought of as closer to universal interest. Spurlock finds a problem of wide interest: the health detriments of a junk food diet. His film not only achieved unusually large audiences for documentary, it prompted fast food companies to review their menus. Part of the task of a documentarist is to make subjects relevant to audiences. Two interventions could be identified as creative in this process, the problematising consequence of a critical approach towards the theme, and exposition that is accessible and appealing to others. Facts and data have little, if any, significance on their own until reflected upon and related to thoughts giving them significance. How documentarists problem-find seems of relevance to what a documentary is. Documentary ideas and subjects can be thought of as the processes directing these interests, finding aspects, pondering their significances, ultimately translating these into media texts.

The number of significant empirical analyses of creative processes at work in the production of visual art is small. Their rarity is a consequence of the complexity of such analysis, compounded by the complexity of works of art.⁸⁴ A model example is Weisberg's analysis of Picasso's *Guernica*. Weisberg analysed the large mural painting Picasso produced for the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 World's Fair in Paris. The painting has war atrocities as its background theme and offers a pictorial reflection upon the aerial bombardment of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. Weisberg employed a quantitative method to evaluate "creative thinking at the highest level",⁸⁵ independent from the artist's

publicly known persona. Of particular interest is the structure of the applied methodology. Weisberg looks through the evidence of *Guernica*'s development, tracing back to its motivations and discerning whether the work was the result of an idea-plan or the consequence of trial and error. The study analyses data collected from the painting itself, the sketches Picasso produced of characters' appearances, their development and their shifting position and form on the large canvas. Weisberg examined four photographs of the work in progress taken at Picasso's studio and reviewed influences from the artist's earlier works. To complement the analysis, he looked at similar works, like Francisco de Goya's engraving series *The Disasters of War*. Weisberg used the data to map the painting's development and to assert that Picasso worked from a "kernel idea" traceable to previous personal work and influences in the creation of *Guernica*. Weisberg maintains that the work was not the product of trial-and-error development resulting from the combination of wild ideas and experimentation. For Weisberg, *Guernica* "was based in one might call a simple or direct extension of his work at that time",⁸⁶ directed by the pursuit of an overall informing idea. Weisberg concluded: "Picasso had a 'skeleton' *Guernica* in mind when he began the work and [...] the process of creation of the composition can be best characterized as an elaboration of a kernel idea rather than the generation of numerous different ideas".⁸⁷

In his conclusion, Weisberg reflects on *Guernica*'s influence in the art world. He notes the painting's significance to be related more to its socio-political influence, the artistry of its author and the poignant relevance of its social

message rather than its ground-breaking qualities in the world of art. He considers *Guernica* part of Picasso's ongoing artistic development rather than an art milestone, like *Les Femmes d'Alger*, which broke with centuries of representation by introducing cubism.

In my films I have one advantage over Weisberg: I do not need to trace the 'fossil evidence' of my own work to access its motivations and influences. The idea of the painting as consequence of a process of idea development and adjustment resonates with the complications of documentary production.

Documentary filmmakers record testimonies from collaborators in the historical world and treat them creatively via selection, interpretation and editing to fulfil the premise behind a 'kernel' idea. It is the idea or ideas that instil the film's message with substance, while a sense of authenticity and factual weight is given by the actual recordings. Attempting a documentary analysis based on the implementation of a kernel idea as an overall informing force seems feasible as long as there is reasonable knowledge of the kernel idea. In many documentary films, their kernel idea can be deduced fairly accurately. The kernel idea of Spurlock's *Supersize Me* is to warn about the true value of a junk food diet: that it can kill you.

Margaret Boden modulates the concept of creative magnitude, giving more importance to the consideration of creativity and ideas relative to the situation and time of their conception. Rather than enquiring if an idea is creative, Boden suggests enquiring "just how creative" it is.⁸⁸ Boden divides creativity categories

in two groups, H-creativity, which is characterised as being historically new, and P-creativity (psychological), characterised as being new for an individual or for a group but unbeknown to them already existing elsewhere. The ideas behind documentary films can be reviewed for their magnitude. For example, *Nanook of the North* (Flaherty, 1922) modified the film domain with its then revolutionary dramatisation of captured footage. Brian Winston describes its narrativisation as a “flash of genius”, understanding the “need to make a drama arise for the life being observed”.⁸⁹ Of Errol Morris’ *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), Winston says it “can stand with *Nanook*, *Housing Problems* and *Primary* as an emblematic marker text”⁹⁰ for its indisputable creative contribution (H-creativity or Big-C), also referring to Anstey’s 1935 film, popularly believed to be the first to introduce interviews on camera, and Drew’s 1960 film *Primary*, a precursor of Direct Cinema with its use of technology for an image-based narrative. More recently, *The Act of Killing* could be mentioned (Oppenheimer, 2012) for its subject treatment and aesthetics. All these films are, in one way or another, recognised by the documentary film field and mark milestones for the entire domain. Just as the main idea informing these films could be identified as the kernel idea, many of the smaller contributing ideas or creative interventions within scripting and production could also be explored for their contribution to these landmark achievements.

Considering creativity is an exercise akin to a frame, where creative instances can be compared within a structure of knowledge that connects them. The frameworks relative to particular domain, the knowledge agreed by those fields,

Boden calls “conceptual spaces [which] are structured styles of thought. They are normally picked up from one’s culture or peer group, but they are occasionally borrowed from other cultures. [...] They are already there: they are not originated by one individual mind”.⁹¹ They can be thought of as geographical spaces that can be explored, having delimiting boundaries, where there are possibilities for discovery. Boden proposes a taxonomy of ideas characterised by their ability to surprise and modify the conceptual space. She classifies ideas into ‘combinational’, ‘exploratory’ and ‘transformational’. Exploratory and transformational creativity require exploration of a structured conceptual space.⁹² Professionals, scientists, artists and documentary filmmakers, as I do, explore conceptual spaces to formulate novel, useful creative ideas. Successful, useful ideas, set new, hitherto improbable landmarks within their sphere, as Boden notes, “by combining the elements according to the rules of a generative system”,⁹³ resulting in its modification. When new creative instances force a reconsideration of rules, previously thought impossible, and cause modification of or engender new structures, they can be considered transformational. As Boden describes, they cause “the transformations of creative spaces in people’s minds”.⁹⁴ Significant, conceptual spaces also represent constraints, the known knowledge and rules representing a discipline. Constraints, as Boden notes, are not only necessary to delimit a conceptual space but to make possible their challenge: “Constraints – far from being opposed to creativity – make creativity possible”.⁹⁵

My method in planning and producing the films and this thesis revolved around the principle of creative constraints. Applying creative constraints as a method of interrogating the creativity involved in challenging such constraints is also the kernel idea. They also help in the search for relevant criteria narrowing and focusing the creative aims to representational strategies. The method is inspired by Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth's *The Five Obstructions* (Trier, 2012). In this film von Trier challenges Leth to make films given certain constraining rules – obstructions, as von Trier calls them – that Leth needs to overcome creatively. Similarly, the films produced for this study were designed with 'obstructions' in mind. In other words, they were designed to overcome imposed difficulties as well as natural ones, and to explore solutions to getting around them, together with the marks they leave on the film's character.

I argue that borrowing and making use of cognitive methods facilitates the exploration of documentary as a conceptual territory delimited by constraints. As Boden proposes, "Many creative achievements result from exploring conceptual spaces in systematic and imaginative ways".⁹⁶ Looking at documentary knowledge in terms of a conceptual space supports a possibly renewed, imaginative exploration and a concerted challenge to its conventions. Boden identifies creativity in all aspects of life, and attributes the capability not to a "special 'faculty' but to an aspect of human intelligence",⁹⁷ asserting that it is "grounded in everyday abilities such as conceptual thinking, perception memory and reflective self-criticism".⁹⁸ The latter is the object of this written exegesis and accompanying practice work.

Chapter Two:

Documentary criticism and representational constraints: a practitioner's view

In the following paragraphs I elaborate on creative ideas in documentary, influenced by those of cognitivists and in relation to aspects of documentary criticism and expectations of the medium, and in terms of creative strategies to challenging some of the mode's perceived problems. In order to understand conceptual creative spaces related to documentary and explore creative ways around its constraints it is important to review and contrast how I as a practitioner, critics and theoreticians understand documentary. Looking into the debates about documentary means looking into its problematic, very likely a factor impacting on documentary makers and the mode's development.

An important aspect of this thesis' argument is based on the internalising of and response to a perceived dissonance between documentary practice and aspects of its criticism. In particular, a response to the expectations I perceive are deposited on documentary and the influence in terms of the use of film forms and resources this might prompt. This perception resonates with arguments about the influence of the mode's theorisation and criticism by authors like Bruzzi, Vaughan, Salles, Godmilow and Ward amongst others ⁹⁹. Probably influenced by an idealised form or model, documentary carries expectations of objectiveness and transparency by which, ideally, documentary films would be somehow capable of bridging the real and its representation

unproblematically. This is a sentiment noted by Bruzzi: “repeatedly invoked by documentary theory is the idealised notion, on the one hand, of the pure documentary in which the relationship between the image and the real is straightforward and, on the other, the very impossibility of this aspiration.”¹⁰⁰

Documentary theorisation has often focused on the difficulty (or impossibility) in practice of uninfluenced representation, perceived, as Bruzzi points out, “to be a problem that must be surmounted”.¹⁰¹ In light of the debates and the high aspirations of the mode, it can be argued that documentarists’ talent has been invested in solving unresolvable ‘problems’ which could be evaluated in different ways, i.e. as constraints and their creative challenges. In addition, documentary’s potential in the social puts particular demands on the documentary director and the formal choices to be made, which are different from those in other film forms. Bill Nichols notes that “Documentary, like other discourses of the real, retains a vestigial responsibility to describe and interpret the world of collective experience, a responsibility that is no small matter at all.”¹⁰² Other critics and directors like Winston and Grierson have defended a role of social transformation for documentary – a role that Salles finds largely “unfounded” and, in his words, that “explains to a great extent the ethical problems in which we become emmeshed”.¹⁰³

Critical reviews principally evaluate documentaries’ final forms by their ‘fossil records’ or evident work (as discussed in Chapter One). It is in searching for reassurance of truthfulness, objectivity or sound authorial ethics in a film’s fossil records where documentary invariably comes up short. The impossibility of

embedding truthfulness or objectivity are limitations of mediation, the film medium and human bias. But truth is expected to be pursued by practitioners and is associated with the documentary film mode. Bondebjerg argues that “emotional dimensions play an extremely important role in forming our social and cultural imagination”, contributing to placing on documentary a “primary expectation of a more direct relationship with the real world”.¹⁰⁴ In her analysis, Bruzzi summarises the unrealistic expectancies placed on the documentary mode, which, as she denounces, expect that “the ultimate aim of documentary [is] to find the perfect way of representing reality so that the distinction between the two becomes invisible”.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, accepting documentary as a practice highlights issues of trust, veracity, ethics and objectivity as meta-constructs. These can be sought but do not materialise and depend on interpretation of the intentions and ability of the author. No amount of formal analysis or psychoanalysis can find such evidence, nor can mechanical or digital recording’s or photography’s indexicality guarantee their presence in the text. As Bondebjerg concludes, documentaries inherit the traits of their makers and engage with the human dimensions of “narrative, emotion and memory”¹⁰⁶. Documentaries are made, constructed in a creative process with all the consequences of this. In the process documentaries inherit our humanity with all its biases and limitations. Documentaries, their makers and the production process are subject to constraints that determine their limitations but also their potential, as Boden argues; constraints frame the possibilities of their creative challenge.

The apparent dissonance between theory and practice can be read in critical debates, arguments and counter-arguments when contrasted with the realities of practice, what Dai Vaughan calls “the labyrinth of rules and exceptions and exceptions to the exceptions, which awaits anyone who tries to identify documentary by generic or stylistic criteria”.¹⁰⁷ Salles¹⁰⁸ denounces the inclusion of caveats in documentary manuals and books about its difficulties or, as Platinga colourfully puts it, its “baffling” nature.¹⁰⁹ I would substitute creative for baffling : documentary can take as many forms as creativity can inspire. Each documentary instance depends on how the author creatively negotiates the representation of reality, and on context and common ground shared by the author and the audience, allowing an understanding of what Umberto Eco calls the “fictional agreement”.¹¹⁰ Bruzzi describes this as a pact¹¹¹ between the filmmaker and the spectator: a tacit agreement by which the author takes on a singular compromise of responsibility towards the spectator and representation, and this is mirrored by spectator’s expectations. Documentary is complex, yet it is this complexity that allows for the wide diversity of ‘life’ that documentaries represent, and its ways of representing it.

Thus, even though attempts have been made, a generalised definition or model of documentary has eluded critics. Nichols notes that “To theorize is to generalize and yet documentary, like the individual work of fiction, holds theory away”.¹¹² When examined in detail, in discrete subject approaches, theorists often achieve a degree of agreement about what documentaries are not. As Lebow argues, “tellingly, theorists more often proffer inevitably flawed

descriptions of what documentary film is not (non-fiction, non acted, non scripted) than of what it may actually be”.¹¹³ Later currents of thinking like Ward’s or Bruzzi’s interpretations of documentary suggest a fluidity about what a documentary is. As Paul Ward writes, “a documentary resides [...] in the complex interaction between text, context, producer and spectator”.¹¹⁴ Bruzzi describes in similar terms the emerging concept of ‘authenticity’ in documentary:

What has emerged in recent documentary practice is a new definition of authenticity, one that eschews the traditional adherence to observation or to a Bazinian notion of the transparency of film and replaces this with a multi-layered, performative exchange between subjects, filmmakers/apparatus and spectators.¹¹⁵

Bruzzi’s idea of documentary is a dynamic one, one that sees documentary “as a perpetual negotiation between the real event and its representation”.¹¹⁶ The main focus of what defines a documentary has shifted from the object to its actors, makers and viewers. Both Ward and Bruzzi put practice, and therefore creativity, at its heart. Ward’s complex ‘encounter’ or Bruzzi’s ‘negotiation’ can be interpreted as revolving around their creative shaping, the choices and intentions of their makers, *their* influences, as well as audiences’ influences and interpretations.

Ward also identifies “the relationship between reality and artifice”¹¹⁷ as central to documentary’s problematic. Like Bruzzi, Ward points to the possible trouble criticism concerning the use of “aesthetic devices”¹¹⁸ causes practitioners, and

the “common sense suggestion [...] that the aesthetics somehow distort or change the reality being represented”.¹¹⁹ Ward finds the overall effect of the process to have a “debilitating effect on understanding documentaries”.¹²⁰ Documentary practice, Ward argues, deadlocked itself into an orthodoxy by which it “should not only consist of ‘natural material’, but that this should appear to viewers as objectively, transparently and ‘undoctored’ as possible”.¹²¹ This discourse led some practitioners to actively disguise production processes and the filmmaker’s intervention, in order to help documentaries appear closer, more faithful to the real. For example, Direct Cinema practitioners proposed an orthodoxy of non-intervention and employment of formal devices to disguise the author and their influence, a set of ambitious constraints that they themselves were unable to follow. In my view, the ‘central tension’ Ward considers needs to be pondered from the point of view of the practitioner, that is, the questionable need to fulfil ideal models of documentary and liaise with the legacy of meanings attributed to documentary by critics and practitioners’ theoretic ideals.

Theoretical currents have also influenced audiences’ expectations of documentaries. Nichols writes about a “constituency of viewers” and questions what “assumptions and expectations characterize the viewing of a documentary”.¹²² Nichols points to a difference between the spectator of fiction and that of documentary that “lies in the status of the text in relation to the historical world”.¹²³ He consequently distinguishes “a documentary mode of engagement for the viewer”¹²⁴ which situates the spectator with a set of expectations once a film is labelled a documentary, in name or by the context of

its dissemination. Annette Hill also turns to viewers and their opinions to re-interpret documentary.¹²⁵ Her and others' interest in empirical research marks a change of direction away from the philosophical towards social reality. Hill grounds her study in methodologies revealing what viewers think of documentary in evolving media ecosystems. Documentary modes of engagement, Hill writes, are "part of particular production ecologies. Genre expectations are dependent on production contexts, and what is commonly understood to be documentary in one country will not necessarily be the same in another."¹²⁶ Her conclusions suggest that her interpretation of documentary is nuanced and culturally specific, and supports the idea of a fluid definition of documentary. Documentary can be different things for different people, implying there is not one but many. Similarly, the possibilities of its codification are potentially as diverse and culturally specific.

In the same spirit and with practitioner's insight, Dai Vaughan suggests that "what makes a 'documentary' is the way we look at it".¹²⁷ Encapsulated in that assertion are the dialectical relationships between aspiration and potential identified by Bruzzi, expressed in a humanised manner, as well as the implicit recognition of an understanding of some sort between documentarist and spectator. Paul Arthur's offer of an alternative description, if not a definition, attunes with Hill's conclusions. Arthur describes documentary, considering this "more sensible" than attempting a general genre definition, describing "a mode of production, a network of funding, filming, postproduction and exhibition tendencies common to work normally indexed as 'documentary'".¹²⁸ Understood

this way, documentary represents a tradition in the social sphere, as Hill proposes, a fluid set of practices, a tendency towards rather than a specific version of a pre-existing pattern, and the result of a practice intended and interpreted as documentary. Such a perspective allows for many possible approaches and outcomes and gives creativity a fundamental role – the role Grierson so successfully encapsulated in his definition ‘the creative treatment of actuality’. It implies maker and viewer are complicit in relation to meanings, relying on wider cultural agreement. Crucially, these approaches celebrate inclusiveness and openness, in contrast to the canonical and taxonomic interpretations Bruzzi criticised: “the creation of a cannon [sic] of films that is exclusive and conservative”.¹²⁹

Bruzzi exemplifies her comments by referring to Nichols’ association of documentary with what he called “the discourses of sobriety”,¹³⁰ an influential idea that offered a way to understand and set expectations for documentary:

Documentary film has a kinship with those other nonfictional systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare – these systems assume they have instrumental power, they can and should alter the world itself, they can effect action and entail consequences.¹³¹

Nichols’ discourses of sobriety helped build an idea of documentary that encourages rigorous rhetoric like that of law or science. The process suggests a preference for formal choices that underline the pretence of difference in its

capabilities from other film forms. If such a premise is accepted by the practitioner, consciously or not, possible creative avenues are redirected to fulfil it, highlighting seriousness and gravity, somehow making documentaries sound and look like documentaries, signposting to the viewer its difference to other modes such as fiction, possibly excluding formal strategies of other practices. Such acceptance presupposes a documentary ideal or formula to aspire to or match and its repetitive encounter to encourage recognition and familiarisation to the model. Not only difficult because of the lack of an agreed, succinct model, repetition of existing patterns can hardly be thought of as creative. As cognitive scientists remind us, patterned habits preclude creativity and the more ingrained they are, the more difficult they are to overcome. Ideologically, in a schema of sobriety, documentary is reserved a privileged role, entitling it to address the public sphere with authority, forcing the practitioner to assume responsibilities and perspectives in possible detriment of the individual voice.

Throughout documentary's history, figures like Grierson were influential in forging the idea of a socially engaged and responsible role for documentary, yet because of their position of authority or background and in spite of their considerable creative contribution, their influence was sober and conservative. Given the length and breadth of Grierson's work leading the documentary film movement, as Aitken notes, Grierson helped forge an idea of politically motivated documentary, in support of the state and democracy,¹³² and encouraged shaping "new media systems which would provide the citizen with social information, show the interdependence of the individual subject and the

social formation, and promote necessary reform”.¹³³ His influence has rippled across decades. Earlier examples of documentary pursuing social meaning could be Vertov’s socially engaged *Kino-Eye* and, recently, Michael Moore, with his idiosyncratic style, unconcerned about political bias, focusing on social issues in turn-of-the-century America. Just as it is not possible to dissociate documentary from its ethical dimension, it cannot be dissociated from the social, but this should not be the same as dissociating documentary from entitlement or authority. Winston was right in his critical interpretation of Grierson’s creative treatment of actuality: the result of treating actuality creatively results in creative interpretation; however, this is not the same as concluding that creative intervention produces fiction, is misleading or of no social use, as the creative excellence of, for instance, Grierson and his movement’s directors, Vertov or Morin and Rouch, proved. The act of representation is a creative one and fair representation can be achieved, as Bruzzi argues.¹³⁴ Creativity is neutral, it can be put to different uses, ethical or unethical, social, fictional, or other; it is the context of its employment that dictates the outcome of its instances.

As a result of Hill’s findings and bearing in mind Arthur’s description, a modal layer could be considered from the practitioner’s perspective. This comprises of intentions in combination with stylistic resources to engage and persuade viewers of its principled link to the real and that what they are watching can be recognised as a documentary. As Vaughan wrote: “To make a documentary is therefore to persuade the viewer that what appears to be is.”¹³⁵ I suggest the significance of a practitioner’s mode of engagement lies in the particular

demands it makes of the practitioner. Its character resides beyond the formal and aesthetic in the author's design and ambitions and ability to convey their intended meanings and possible audience readings. This is how Vaughan describes, if not defines documentary: "the history of documentary has been the succession of strategies by which filmmakers have tried to make viewers look at films this way".¹³⁶ Vaughan clarifies the meaning of looking at films as documentary: "to see its meaning as pertinent to the events and objects which passed before the camera; to see it, in a word, as signifying what it appears to record."¹³⁷ In Vaughan's words can be read a mandatory factor in the creative brief of the documentary maker: persuade the viewer of the link to the real and possibly of the maker's ethical approach. Vaughan's assertion considers the maker's intent and the spectator's agency and their active part in the enactment of documentary.

In creative practice, small, nuanced variations can lead to very different meanings and readings. Vaughan's ideas suggest a film becomes a documentary as it is enacted throughout its design, production and dissemination, and importantly as it is viewed and understood as such in collaborative interpretation. Having pondered the expectations deposited on documentarists and given the development of media and audiences, it could be questioned if there really is a need today to signpost to viewers that they are watching a documentary. Freedom from such a constraint is a stimulating thought and prompts the question of whether practitioners like me are too preoccupied with making documentaries rather than making films.

Creative process and strategy

Strategy and creative implementation can be understood as enacting the dialectical relationship between aspirations and potential that Bruzzi proposes and that resonates with cognitive scientists' methods of achieving creative results. The form of the encounter process Bruzzi describes resonates with my experience in practice: films are born of thoughts, ideas to be expressed in film and designs to make them explicit with originality. An important difference to other modes is the often haphazard process of sourcing from the historical real. Documentaries can be made in complete or near complete control, following scripts and using acted sequences, or with live recordings of collaborators. Yet recording events often introduces a degree of unpredictability. It is, in my experience, a welcome unpredictability that gives original character, and is a sign of discovery or an uncovering of newness and interest. To realise their potential meanings, these recordings need to be ordered around the controlling idea into a story or discourse of some sort, most of which happens in the editing process. This dual creative process could be identified with the 'geneptore' method, where a previous search for ideas and proposals is followed by a review to take advantage of possible new connections mirrored in selection and editing. Editing exploits the footage's potential, bringing into contiguity or expressing problem finding and solving, in the process giving meaning to the accrued actuality and allowing interpretation. To illustrate this and ahead of the next chapter's comprehensive analysis of the accompanying films, *Filling the*

Gaps exposes the spectator to two disconnected discourses (the author's implementation of the controlling idea or the film's strategy), Dürer's rhinoceros engraving and imagined ideas of Morocco, inviting the spectator to bring personal conclusions to their contiguity (in suggestion of the controlling idea: reflect on the need for imagination to piece together stories, real or fantasy). It can also be interpreted as the generation of preinventive ideas and the practical search for their exposition to audiences in film. This process resonates with Vaughan's idea that approach to representation sets documentary film apart; not style or film devices, but the manner of their use. Creativity and its strategies define documentary at the moment of conception, when its aspirations determine its forms and while it is still unencumbered by a problematic of representation or ethical evaluation of its results.

Bruzzi, performativity and creative strategies

Recent approaches to critical interpretation of documentary representation, notably Bruzzi's ideas of performativity, celebrate authors' strategies in sharing the documentation act through the filmmakers' performance. One way to interpret Bruzzi's idea of documentary, as perpetual negotiation between the real and its representation, is to evaluate her observations of films by directors like Dinnen or Broomfield as implementations of creative strategies.

Performativity originally acknowledges the documentary film mode's constraints, making best use of the author's performance and medium to overcome them.

Citing Weiss, Bruzzi notes that

documentary is born of a negotiation between two potentially conflicting factors: the real and its representation; but rather than perceive this to be a problem that must be surmounted – as it is perceived in much documentary film theory – Weiss accepts this propensity towards a dialectical understanding of the factual world to be ‘an asset and a virtue’.¹³⁸

A performative approach to filmmaking avoids some of the pitfalls of earlier creative approaches incurred prompting questions about their representational strategy. These have most often resulted in hiding a film’s construction and pursuing immediacy as a signifier of veracity. Instead, in performative documentaries, filmmakers are seen enacting the instances of documentation, sharing the mode collaboratively with the spectator. Looking into creative input and implementation, Bruzzi’s analysis evidences the search by filmmakers for ways to accommodate aspirations for their documentaries that acknowledge their construction and artificiality, making this evident in their films and rejecting the installation of the spectator in a realist system that, ideally, would be interpreted as equivalent approximation to the real.

Bruzzi proposes the idea of documentary as a “performative act” which she describes as “inherently fluid and unstable and informed by issues of performance and performativity”.¹³⁹ She leads the questioning of theoretical assumptions about performance in documentary and sees the challenge to taxonomical ordering of documentary in the innumerable forms documentary adopts, the hybridisation of modes and their increasingly eclectic nature.¹⁴⁰ Her

argument is also distinct from earlier critical currents in that she avoids further problematising of documentary's mode of representation and rejects the acceptance of documentary films as a paradox of predictable failure, seen as an unsuccessful mode of representation incapable of attaining "the ideal of the pure documentary uncontaminated by the subjective vagaries of representation".¹⁴¹ Like Arthur's sensible approach, at the heart of Bruzzi's analysis is a call to refocus by "reminding ourselves that reality does exist and can be represented", or accepting that "documentary can never be the real world".¹⁴² Essentially, this is a reminder of the necessary creative interpretation every documentary author performs. Bruzzi's incisive view of documentary as negotiation between the real and its representation identifies documentary not as a static, generic cultural object but as a dynamic cultural practice resulting in documentary film instances. This way documentaries are created as they are enacted and watched: "documentaries are performative acts [...] a negotiation between filmmaker and reality and at heart a performance".¹⁴³ Bruzzi explores these ideas in the documentaries of Molly Dineen, Nick Broomfield, Errol Morris and Nicholas Barker, where the filmmaker is present, often on camera, enacting the enquiry as it witnesses and records the encounter. Recording the nature of the exchange between filmmaker and participants exposes the construction of representation, as the issues relating to the particular enquiry are revealed, affirming transparency through visible action rather than suggest this transparency through stylistic resources like realistic representation aesthetics or enhanced immediacy. It gives agency to the spectator allowing for interpretative involvement. Their films are "given meaning by the interaction

between performance and reality”.¹⁴⁴ The performative acts and negotiations Bruzzi identifies, it can be argued, are fundamentally creative.

Bruzzi’s interpretation of documentary as a ‘negotiation’ between representation and the real acknowledges the filmmaker’s creative contribution. This contribution – the film’s construction – is deliberately exposed giving audiences’ access to the ‘insides’ of a documentary. As Bruzzi describes them they are a “‘record’ and a performance of a kind”,¹⁴⁵ the enacting of documentary as it is performed. Molly Dineen illustrates this in an early scene from *Geri* (1999) where Halliwell speaks to her solicitor about her decision to allow Dineen to make a documentary following her resignation from the Spice Girls. Following the conversation, Dineen clarifies Halliwell’s views and the audience at once about how documentaries come about: they are intended and worked into existence by a documentary filmmaker’s work. With her remarks Dineen makes audiences aware that documentary films are not a series of events that happen in convenient sequence, or the convenient publicity for a subject, but are the result of choices, tireless work, chasing ideas, a multiplicity of skills, and collaboration with other creative, subjects and audiences

There are several layers of creative input at work in performative documentary films. There is the filmmaker’s performance in front of camera, in which the author adopts the documentarist role. This shows nuanced differences or entirely different characterisations according to circumstances. This is made obvious in Broomfield’s performances, like his acting naïve in *The Leader, His*

Driver and His Driver's Wife (1991). Over this performance is the director's performance behind the camera and that of the entire production team, investing their know-how and creativity from inception, scripting and design, editing, post-production, to finalising for dissemination. One more layer can be interpreted in the relationship of the text, context and the spectator, which allows for individual interpretations. Creative performative strategies are not confined to the visibly present author method, like former private investigator Morris's performance using investigative reporting techniques in *The Thin Blue Line* (1988). Understanding the film-text according to Austin's¹⁴⁶ or as Searles' approaches,¹⁴⁷ audiences contribute to the performance as actors of its expressions through their interpretation of the text or parts of it as, for example, advice, challenges, questions or requests and the modification of their thinking, attitudes or actions viewers might take in consequence. Performative documentaries find a way to a representation in a more balanced way, shared between authors and audiences.

Reflexivity in performative films encourage consideration of the influence of mediation and the limits of representation and the represented; they make obvious that films are the consequence of their authors' actions and creative development, and are personal. They evidence the serendipity in their findings, signalling that their films do not exclude other findings, angles or possible results. In Broomfield's films an important aspect of the creative drive is evidenced in his insightful understanding of situations, knowing how to extract the most significance out of them. His films are accomplished creative

performances using documentary-making know-how. In Dineen's films, we are reminded that we are looking at the motivations and aims of the film's director.

The films deliberately expose their author's efforts to get to the stories.

Paraphrasing Bruzzi, documentaries are at heart creative performances. As reviewed in the previous chapter, creativity does not enlighten artists casually; it is the fruit of ideas, knowledge, ability and hard work, just as documentaries are. Looking at documentary as performance prompts the question of how far the concept of performativity can be stretched to other strategies that are not so obvious a performance on screen.

In the same spirit as performative documentaries – show, don't tell – but with a different interpretation, documentary filmmakers like the directors of Cinema Verité or Direct Cinema encouraged hiding or excusing their films' construction, designing their creative strategies to distract from the medium and author influence in order to appear more loyal to reality.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps the most iconic and influential of such proposals is Direct Cinema or American Observational. Direct Cinema developed lasting, influential creative representation strategies, displaying creative drive beyond film forms, actively collaborating in the development of equipment to facilitate their practice. Yet their proponents framed their practice in terms of assertions of objectivity or renewed impartiality, for which they were criticised. I concentrate on the American version of Cinema Verité because their claims, movement and early films better illustrate the paradox they created between expectations of the mode and creative practice.

They devised a complex strategy implemented through stylistic choices to support their ambition to represent events in a manner that would allow them to get to their true significances, as Beattie recalls, in a way no other film form or creative strategy could.¹⁴⁹ While their formal creative innovation reached outstanding heights, their ambitions to render or elicit truths outside of recorded events were flawed. Contemplated in its historical context, Saunders finds inaccurate the conclusions of critical theorisation of the movement, “most of which reduce the movement to an uncommitted aesthetic mode whose realist conceits, performative naturalism and procedural effacement preclude orientation”.¹⁵⁰ Saunders’ ‘realist conceits’, the focus of the movement’s criticism, can be looked at as the ambitions of Direct Cinema directors’ creative strategy, implemented through a particular set of self-imposed constraints to give character to their negotiation between the real and its representation. Their enthusiastic expectations were let down by the difficulty or impossibility of fulfilling them, resulting in the breaking of their self-imposed constraints. Their films represent a remarkably successful stylistic creative development, as authors like Saunders¹⁵¹ or Beattie¹⁵² acknowledge; hence their place in documentary folklore as prototypical. Their adoption by other film practices testifies to their success. Their practice received names, now in the vernacular, like *Verité* or *fly-on-the-wall*, for their pursuit of a formal style to represent ‘being there’. It is one of the creative approaches that defies Chanan’s historical amnesia, by which documentaries disappear too quickly from the publishing panorama and memory so that their achievements, and possible flaws, are bound to be repeated by following generations.¹⁵³

Direct cinema, creative strategies and constraints

Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité filmmakers devised their creative system around the idea of getting closer to subjects and the significance of their lives' events. As Beattie notes the films "aimed to reveal the truths of human existence residing behind the surface facts".¹⁵⁴ A noble, enthusiastic, but arguably tall order. However, taking advantage of new portable technology, they were successful in achieving enhanced immediacy and capturing audiences' imagination, on its own a great achievement. Their practice avoided signs of construction or intervention for an, apparently, more direct connection to the films' subjects and viewers – a pretence of almost uninfluenced mediation. Their self-imposed constraints also include economy of formal style, avoidance of set-ups, handheld camera work, direct sound recording, use of available light when possible, long takes and economic editing, create a sensation of intimacy, more easily identified with presence than earlier creative representation strategies because of the sparse reminders of construction, or the influence of camera and crew. These and other constraints like non-intervention, respect for the chronological order of events, in-camera editing, or avoiding questioning and interviews, were ideated to support the professed eliciting of crucial truths to which the authors were committed, yet some of these processes were readily sacrificed either because they could not fulfil them or because they disadvantaged a film's potential.

Errol Morris said of Vérité that it “set back documentary twenty or thirty years”.¹⁵⁵ The expectations Direct Cinema directors created for their films encouraged suspicion of documentary and the building of a reputation (as Bruzzi, Lebow, Min-ha and Ward endeavour to deny,) of a failed genre. To fulfil expectations, Vérité and Direct Cinema strategies present actuality in an apparently raw, unaltered, uninfluenced manner, inspired by ideals of journalism and earlier ethnographic documentary of fact, pursuing an ambition of objectivity. Their formal creative strategy enhanced immediacy by offering a seemingly un-stylised, un-manipulated, engaging, and convincing but ultimately composed representation of the complex real. Directors employed newly designed cameras with faster 16mm film stock and synchronised sound, obtaining a fresh, new viewing experience. Cameras could adopt perspectives and movements seldom seen before and their effect was deemed more immersive than previous or other contemporary approaches. Vogels wrote of their newness and reception: “Camera shots were sometimes unsteady or grainy, and the soundtrack was occasionally inaudible, but such features gave the audience a novel sense of being on the scene, amidst unfolding events”.¹⁵⁶ Their representational strategies arguably encourage identification, resulting in spectators relaxing scrutiny which might remind them that what is conveyed is contained in the film frame.

Interviewed in 1979, Emile de Antonio, prolific and acclaimed political documentary filmmaker of the 1960s and 70s, criticised Cinema Verité, revealing the choice of constraints and expectations created. De Antonio called

Verité a “lie” and “a childish assumption about the nature of film”; he criticised the “the belief of lack of prejudice. There is no film made without pointing a camera and the pointing of that camera is, in a sense, a definite gesture of prejudice, of feeling”.¹⁵⁷ Politically active and committed, an “advocate of bias” and “foregrounding of opinion”,¹⁵⁸ de Antonio found the movement’s ideas of pretended political neutrality and capability for capturing “truths” disingenuous: “there is not one of those Verité films that couldn’t be challenged on the bases of whose truth was it. It is much better, I think, to make a film from the position you really occupy, rather than pretend you occupy no position”.¹⁵⁹ Such opinions are in tune with Bondebjerg’s cognitive approach and ideas about film’s inheritance of the author’s human limitations, discussed in Chapter One. De Antonio made similar use of equipment for close formal creative styles but his approaches place his films in contrast with Direct or Observational cinema by making evident ideological influences and rhetorical purpose.

In Peter Wintonick’s *Cinema Verite: Defining the Moment* (1999), archive footage of Robert Drew, one of the architects of Direct Cinema, shows him summarising his idea of a new reportage and documentary mode, inspired by contemporary photojournalism and the photo essay. Drew calls pre-Direct Cinema documentaries ‘dull luxuries’ and, in archive footage, sitting next to Richard Leacock, describes what he was searching for in newly styled documentary films: documentaries, he says, “were luxuries, picture illustrations or interviews which is the same thing. Then, real life never got out of the film, never came to the television set, and we will have to drop word logic and find a

dramatic logic in which things really happen.” Leacock similarly anticipated the development of a renewed film form: “we were experimenting. All the rules were new. We were, in fact, developing a new grammar which was entirely different from that of silent filmmaking and of fiction film-making”.¹⁶⁰ Drew became an editor with Time-Life after a career as an air force pilot. He put his engineering skills into the design and development of portable film and sync sound equipment in a display of determination and creative talent beyond media content making. In Wintonick’s film Drew describes his ideals for the new form of film reporting:

[it] would be a theatre without actors, plays without playwrights, it will be reporting without summary and opinion, the ability to look at people’s lives at crucial times when you can deduce certain things and see a kind of truth that can only be gotten by personal experience.

Drew associated with D. A. Pennebaker and Richard Leacock to produce films for broadcasters like Time-Life. *Primary* (1960) was the first major experiment of Direct Cinema. The film is a great achievement and also a (small) disappointment. Jonas Mekas, then editor of the journal *Film Culture*, said of the film: “[The filmmakers] have caught scenes of real life with an unprecedented authenticity, immediacy and truth [...] The techniques of *Primary* indicate that we are entering a new era”.¹⁶¹ *Primary* was filmed on handheld camera with sync sound, close to subjects, as Primary candidates attend different stages of their political campaigning. It adopts an image-led narrative style without narration that met the ambition Drew and his associates had for their films. In

dark, difficult scenes there is evidence of what seems to be the technology's limitations. Nevertheless, the novel rough-and-ready style contributed a sensation of immediacy. However, it is not the technical or stylistic aspects that drew criticism of the film, its strategy and its makers from critics and other filmmakers, but in their raising of expectations. The Maysles brothers commented about the expectations created: "there is no such thing as being strictly objective in anything that is at all artistic. Any objective-like approximation rests on personal integrity: being essentially true to the subject".¹⁶² In response to these limitations the Maysles brothers defended a "subjective-objectivity" for their own films.¹⁶³

Primary arrived on selected Time-Life screens well after the elections were over, thus losing its news appeal. Aspirations of political neutrality and pretended uninfluencing side-line observation drowned on their first attempt: *Primary* plays to Kennedy's modern, media-friendly personality, to the detriment of Humphrey. Their differences, personalised in their wives, could not be any wider: Ms Humphrey, uncomfortable on camera, versus the sophisticated charm of Jacqueline Kennedy. Their intentions of aseptic non-intervention were evidently broken: scenes showing Kennedy posing for a photographer, the careful staging of his image, are followed by Humphrey's poster on the front of his touring bus. The last images of *Primary* show a Humphrey campaign bumper sticker on the back of an old car driving away in a rustic setting. Whether consciously or not, *Primary's* directors were announcing the coming of the urban political media superstar and the demise, the goodbye, to the face-to-

face, local, rural politician. Drew, Leacock, the Maysles and Pennebaker's commercial set-up, as Saunders notes, hardly allowed for critical approaches that risked alienating the powerful and the publisher's gatekeepers.¹⁶⁴ The Kennedys acted their rehearsed campaign towards election success and political influence. The filmmakers could not avoid reporting without position or opinion; they looked into one of the crucial moments of US and world history, but it is questionable whether they enabled access to 'a kind of truth' independent from their own interpretation.

The self-imposed constraints of the early core group of American Observation filmmakers proved to be overly restrictive. The association with Drew lasted only two years. In subsequent productions, the filmmakers chose which constraints to challenge and which to ignore, allowing wider avenues for personal creative development, diluting earlier pleas made for their films. Probably the longest-lasting constraint and the most closely observed was the pursuit of visual-led narrative and avoidance of voiced narration. Other constraints, like non-intervention, were, if not impossible, more complicated to enact. Paraphrasing de Antonio, the filmmaker necessarily occupies a position. Direct Cinema directors' subjects were creatively constructed, unavoidably interpreted, yet the attractive promise of non-intervention had already raised expectations.

The constraining ideas initially pursued, the 'restrictive purview' of Drew's direction as Saunders called it, became an obstacle to the development of the

creative and stylistic personality of his partners. The Maysles brothers began their own production company, as did Leacock and Pennebaker. This could be interpreted as freeing themselves from dogmatic dictates, allowing them to choose which constraints to challenge. Albert and David Maysles' *Salesman* (1969) montages show a departure from chronology and the signifying of logical space and time through creative means: editing and non-diegetic music. After a few visits with no sales results, the film's main character Paul Brennan drives through snow-covered streets. Brennan adjusts the car's radio so that classical music accompanies his drive. Shots show him driving, wearing hat, raincoat and blazer, a wool jumper peeping out below the raincoat sleeves, as the car travels through the snowy landscapes. Eventually a shot through the windscreen shows the motel sign, his destination. Through the montage, from the snow-covered streets to the arrival at the motel, the classical music plays uninterrupted, giving continuity in time to what seem recordings of different times and locations. The subsequent scene takes place inside the motel. Brennan enters the motel room wearing no raincoat and takes off his blazer to reveal just a short-sleeve shirt underneath. The montage has constructed a scene in sequential time: Brennan's door-to-door efforts, braving the snow, to a conversation about his disappointing sales in his motel room, with his fellow salesman, most probably happening in a different season. The 'dramatic logic of the scene' is found not in the chronological order of recorded events, but in the creative composition in the editing room. While this doesn't invalidate the point the Maysles make about the tough reality of life as a bible salesman, it does invalidate claims of non-intervention, play without playwright or a neutral

position. It also calls attention to what might have been left out: presumably Brennan had good sales days. Observation is therefore selective in order to meet the objectives of the author; the reality portrayed fits the maker's intent. Reality is complex; balance and nuance are unavoidably lost in selective editing, thus raising further questions about observational documentary as a mode to obtain, as Drew desired, a "kind of truth only possibly gotten by personal experience".¹⁶⁵

The Maysles, as with their former associates and other of the movement's filmmakers, showed the need for resourcefulness and creative drive to make films differently and bring aspects of reality to audiences in an interesting and relevant manner. Creativity showed in their practice as resourcefulness and strategic use of film devices and forms. Saunders commented on the Maysles' genius: when banned from the Beatles performance on the Ed Sullivan Show, they found a better alternative and filmed a family witnessing the Beatles captivating American audiences on television.¹⁶⁶ In adversity, circumstantially constrained, their response was inspired by creative drive. In spite of their outstanding creative achievements, real life, as Robert Drew aspired, does not really come out of films.

From their enthusiastic beginnings, Direct Cinema directors' commitment to self-imposed constraints became more relaxed. Nevertheless, the promise made to capture truth lingered in its association with observational documentary. The paradoxical stand between 'representation' and the 'real' in

this understanding of documentary is similar to the reflections about 'suture' expressed in film theory. Agnieszka Piotrowska describes 'suture' as progress from "the illusory identification with the screen to the realization that it is but an illusion" where "the frame of the screen frames the limit of the spectator's experience".¹⁶⁷ Early in film criticism, filmmakers and movements like the Moscow School levelled criticism at continuity editing for enacting this suture, by which the spectator is offered a form of representation that actively disguises the means of its construction.

Political motivations also made demands on the film mode. For example, Soviet filmmakers and critics supported montage, among other reasons, for creating meaning by giving the spectator agency in interpretation. Similarly, critical ideas of mainstream cinema also motivated Counter-Cinema. Cook and Bernink notice how Counter Cinema denounced "the illusionist conventions of mainstream cinema [that] obscure[d] the real conditions of its production".¹⁶⁸ Although these examples were directed at film in general, suspicion lingers in relation to documentary because of its social and ethical dimensions. A great deal of creative talent has been employed in finding ways that make it appear as if a work is overcoming the limitations of the film medium rather than exploring, exposing or taking advantage of them in collaboration with audiences. As Wollen declares,

cinema cannot show the truth or reveal it, because the truth is not out there in the real world, waiting to be photographed. What cinema can do

is produce meanings and meanings can only be plotted, not in relation to a yardstick or criterion of truth, but in relation to other meanings[.]¹⁶⁹

The creation of meaning and formal originality demand the intervention of conceptualisation. This is achieved through associative ideations and creative deployment through choices and treatment of filmic devices. In this process creativity is agnostic and provides no solution for the imprinting of truths into film, but can be devoted to their exploration. Although the concept of truthfulness has gradually lost some of its critical importance in the interpretation of fiction film, it still reflects on documentary. The problematisation of the relationship between documentary and politics, like other aspects of documentary problematising, has weighed on documentary. Nevertheless, documentarists' accepted constraints, including those influenced by the mode's critical debates, have stimulated creativity rather than impeding it. As discussed in the next chapter, the method for the creative analysis of the films I have produced uses this premise: observation of the negotiation of natural as well as artificially introduced constraints in order to highlight the creative paths to their negotiation. Responses to these constraints' stimuli, being arbitrarily introduced, natural or in consequence of criticism, can be traced in the particular use documentary practice makes of formal devices and creative strategies.

New affordances and constraints of the digital

In search for new representational strategies, documentary is populating the digital, where makers find new creative opportunities and constraints which can themselves be creatively challenged; so too are there renewed challenges to the constraints inherited from analogue media. The remediations of documentary into the digital go well beyond the digitalisation of the means of production. The affordances of the digital make possible interactivity, dynamic sorting and treatment, networking, and their combinations, which open possibilities and multiply creative opportunities. The ramifications are profound, though are now just at their beginning.

Aston and Gaudenzi argue that “i-docs should not be seen as the uneventful evolution of documentaries in the digital realm but rather as a form of nonfiction narrative that uses action and choice, immersion and enacted perception as ways to construct the real, rather than to represent it”.¹⁷⁰ They propose a deliberately open definition of i-docs in response to their ‘newness’, multiplying combinational forms and the screens occupied. They suggest that “any project that starts with an intention to document the ‘real’ and that uses digital interactive technology to realize this intention can be considered an interactive documentary”.¹⁷¹ Stefano Odorico argues for a reconsideration of ‘web documentary’ in contrast to “traditional documentary”. He defines the former – “also called interactive documentaries, cross-media documentaries and docuwebs” – as

complex Internet platforms (websites) which recreate that ‘documentary value’ proper of the classic nonfiction films and which are characterized by the presence of distinctive recurring elements including an intuitive menu, maps, timelines, videoclips, hyperlinks and direct connections to social networks[.]¹⁷²

Aston, Gaudenzi and Rose also note that i-docs “prompt us to ask not what documentary means but what documentary does”.¹⁷³ Fundamental to i-docs, they see interactivity as “a means through which the viewer is positioned within the artifact itself, demanding of him or her to play an active role in the negotiation of the reality being conveyed”,¹⁷⁴ and thus it is a documentary form that somehow includes the viewer or spectator as active in respect of the documentary, intervening, for example, in aspects of its ‘projection’ or in contribution to determining narrative discourse. Guided by my ‘creative constraints’ method to maximise spectator agency and explore possibilities of ceding authorial control, one of the documentaries of this thesis, *Mechanising the Catch*, became an i-doc or web documentary. In the following chapter I analyse and reflect on its production and the creative negotiation of constraints and into the creative input in the films I made for this project. I discuss them in relation to the methodology derived from cognitive sciences, used to encourage creativity, and what Thomas Elsaesser calls “creative constraints” and Lars von Trier calls “obstructions” (in his film co-authored with Jørgen Leth, *The Five Obstructions* (2003)).

Chapter Three:

Creative constraints, creative analysis and three constrained films

Documentarists make films under the same pressures, carrying out the same duties, as other filmmakers, but have the added task of reassuring, if not persuading the viewer that their film has a genuine and ethically sound relationship to real events. Critics and scholars like Wollen, Cowie and Ward, discussed earlier, have acknowledged that the moral order of events cannot be photographed; film (or video) only captures light and sound whilst other aspects fundamental to documentary making are meta-constructs that have to be presumed, guaranteed solely by the compromise established by filmmakers with their audiences. Documentary could be said to be fundamentally characterised by the authors' compromise of a fair treatment of events and subjects and the signalling of that to audiences. Documentarists reassure their audiences through forms and devices (i.e. interviews or recordings of actuality) which in turn have helped to characterise the documentary mode.

However, not all of the filmmaker's efforts to make a film a documentary are obvious. An animated film may or may not contain interviews, is devoid of direct visual recordings, yet it might claim a link to reality. Animated films like *Pequeñas Voces* (Carrillo-Andrade, 2011) or *Waltz with Bashir* (Folman, 2008) exemplify this. The latter uses animation and scripted memories to document events impossible to access with cameras, like the battlefield. Looking into creative conception and development might assist in recognising what

contributes to evidencing the enactment of the author's tacit compromise to his audience. I would highlight on the basis of such examples how documentary authors and publishers articulate their films' relationship to the real, consisting of bespoke approaches to negotiating the unavoidable gap mediation imposes. These approaches could be interpreted as creative solutions.

In creating these bespoke approaches, already recognised authors and new ones start from different positions. Renowned authors like Werner Herzog or Andrew Jarecki might be afforded trust by their audiences, earned through their work over their career spans. In contrast, the beginner filmmaker must earn this trust through their films. Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012) is probably the first of his films most of his world audience would watch. The film persuades audiences of its genuine portrayal of events through a successful combination of ideas and execution. After watching the film, one may contest many of its aspects, but spectators are left in no doubt of the gravity, extent, nature and implications of the events related. It is Oppenheimer's approach to obtaining the story from a group of protagonists that makes the film compelling: its creative development elicits the story of events while allowing the protagonists to reflect on the events related. Oppenheimer produces his subject's film, facilitating *their* writing, re-enacting and filming of *their* story. Some documentaries like Oppenheimer's explore beyond the recording from reality in the way the filmmaker 'installs' the spectator in an aspect of that reality, to reassure them of the film's authenticity. *The Act of Killing* or *Waltz with Bashir* demonstrate different approaches are possible.

As I have discussed in relation to cognitive approaches in the generation of ideas and the manner of their treatment in practice, there is a need to consider the represented and its representation in terms of the creative input necessary to travel from one to other. For creative acts to happen, knowledge, observation, reflection and associations of ideas are fundamental. Creativity intervenes in the association of previously unrelated ideas, thus materialising into newer ones. Similar processes of association and deduction are necessary in reading a film and watching documentaries. Yet documentaries are seldom approached by the ideas that informed them: it is more common to read or hear what a documentary is about, or to hear it described by instances of its narrative. Arguably, however, it is ideas that first inform films. *Shoah* (Lanzmann, 1985) is more than a film denouncing the Holocaust or a series of interviews with holocaust survivors and Nazi collaborators; *The Act of Killing* is more than a documentary about the cruelty of death squads in 1960s Indonesia. They express ideas, often complex, which their authors believed should be shared. Thus, tracing the creative input of documentary films will necessarily require searching for their engendering ideas and forms of implementation. Defining what an idea is, however, is not simple or easy. They are easier to recognise once formulated and implemented than to name, describe or put into practice. The analysis via creative constraints that follows is an attempt to trace a film's creative development.

Creative motivations, obstructions and creative constraints

In Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth's *The Five Obstructions* a 'creative method' acts as the film's main controlling idea. In the film, von Trier challenges his one-time mentor Leth to perform certain tasks in order to help break his creative block. Von Trier challenges Leth to consider constraints in conceptualising and making remakes of his film *The Perfect Human* (Leth, 1967). *The Perfect Human* is a short art film that uses the aesthetics and language of advertising in a detached and impassive observed mode. The film, shot in black and white, looks at a man and a woman against a white background and questions the audience about them. Its actors are treated as models. The images and set-up are pleasing, somehow familiar; they would not be out of place in perfume or fashion commercials of the time. They are, nevertheless, original in their logic and graphic treatment, engaging the viewer with a mix of seductive style, voyeuristic sensuality and a distancing air of sophisticated mysticism, deliberately avoiding emotional empathy. The music and cadenced, nearly whispered voice-over and rhetorical questions contribute to create such an air. The viewer is challenged to piece together images and thoughts in the open-ended, interrogative discourse. *The Five Obstructions* portrays Leth's personality and ethos in approaching film. He comes across as detached, unemotional, confident and set in his ways. He is troubled by depression in his Haitian retirement, it is revealed later in the film, and creatively exhausted. To shake him out of depressive gloom, von Trier devises a plan, giving him the task of remaking *The Perfect Human* but imposing on each remake a series of

conditions von Trier calls 'obstructions'. On the first assignment he instructs, or constrains, Leth to use only 12 frames per take, or half a second between cuts, motivated by the knowledge of Leth's preference for long takes. He also forces him to shoot in Cuba, where he would be uncomfortable: unfamiliar with the local language, with limited production means and restricted by the authorities (i.e. they would assign him government minders and not allow Leth to build a set). On subsequent remakes von Trier, aware of Leth's resourcefulness makes the obstructions more personal, trying to involve him emotionally as well as creatively.

For my enquiry, it is their purposeful use of constraints to encourage creative response that is of interest. Von Trier, together with and quickly followed by other Danish upcoming film directors, like Vinterberg, Levin and Kragh-Jacobsen, published in 1995 the *Dogme 95 Manifesto*. The *Manifesto* championed filmmaking centred in traditional values of story, theme and acting, rejecting as far as possible technological intervention other than that strictly necessary to make a film; thus disposing of lighting equipment or camera aids like dollies or cranes. Their *Manifesto* was expressed in "Vows of Chastity" which can be understood as a constraining system. As Mette Hjort suggests,¹⁷⁵ in formulating Dogme von Trier was influenced by desires to reclaim the director as artist central to a film's development, in light of the deconstruction of the author best represented in the work of Foucault and Barthes.

Thomas Elsaesser contributes to a similar discourse on finding a new frame for auteur and authorship in the current global film scene, where an auteur's value, "pervaded by market considerations",¹⁷⁶ has become a sort of reputation currency, or brand. He considers it to be too early for a total dismissal of the author, considering that author redundancy "philosophically problematic and conceptually vague merely reinforces the author's indispensability, both as a reality and as a concept".¹⁷⁷ Elsaesser considers external constraints on the author but particularly self-imposed ones as a form of rebellion and an attempt to retain control. Elsaesser builds on the frame suggested by Lessig, namely the four constraints that "regulate behaviour in the world" ("Law, market, social norm and architecture, 'the technological infrastructure that has replaced "nature"").¹⁷⁸ Elsaesser points out that "constraints operate in other activities like filmmaking, but Lessig's schema takes no account of the areas of freedom and autonomy we call 'art': the unfettered freedom of the imagination and the claim to be in control [...] defines the auteur".¹⁷⁹ Yet unfettered freedom never truly exists since we are all subject to constraints of some order. However, Elsaesser elaborates on their value as a vehicle of control and object for rebellion:

Whichever way one looks at it, effective counter-strategies or subversion have to come from within rather than without, and they do so in the form of additional constraints: these, however, must be freely chosen rather than submitted to under protest, or adopted via compromise. The name of such a freely chosen restriction is a creative constraint[.]¹⁸⁰

It might sound paradoxical, making a virtue of constraints and choosing to challenge them, but such restraint has a purpose: “to master a situation, by first making it worse: to aggravate it, turn it against oneself, and to internalize it, as a way of regaining some form of agency and control”.¹⁸¹

Von Trier and Elsaesser are concerned with the author and authorship, their agency and degree of control. The latter summarises Lessig’s and Elster’s ideas about constraints of authorship in cinema in order to highlight the possibility of their productive use,

distinguishing between external constraints and creative constraints, with the external constraints being the ones named by Lessig as enabling humans to engage with their lived environment and to effect change, and creative constraints being the ones that renegotiate a different kind of autonomy and freedom[.]¹⁸²

If Elsaesser’s primary inspiration for the concept of constraints is Lessig, the second and most direct influence is Jon Elster. In *Ulysses Unbound* Elster formulated ideas of constraint in the arts as motivations.¹⁸³ The title makes reference to Ulysses ordering that he be tied to the mast of his ship to make sure he resisted the call of the sirens, paradoxically giving orders to contradict his orders in case he demanded to be untied.¹⁸⁴ Elster also “distinguishes between essential and incidental constraints”; the first “are chosen for the sake of expected benefits, while the second may turn out to have benefits but are not chosen for the sake of these benefits”. Unlike Elsaesser’s study, which focuses on authorial control, this study focuses on creative input and creative analysis.

In relation to documentary, added to the mode's and film's incidental constraints must be considered those around turning a projected film specifically into a documentary.

In light of Elsaesser and Elster's views, author expression could be thought to begin with the choice of constraints and the manner of their challenge. The relevance of Elsaesser's and Elster's ideas to this thesis can be illustrated by arguing that documentary filmmakers choose a set of constraints, among which are those that make their films documentaries, which in turn has formal consequences. Constraints can be abstract, e.g. ethical, beginning with the commitment the filmmaker voluntarily makes towards spectators when deciding to make a documentary. Or they can be formal, particularly in documentary, in order to show a convincing link to the real, for example relying on testimony and interviews. Abstract constraints have a defining effect on the formal ones and these are fixed in the film's final form. This could be seen as the authorial negotiation which Bruzzi observes:¹⁸⁵ the filmmaker's bespoke approach to the film in relationship to the real. Whether abstract or formal, such constraints are subject to the author's choice and can be negotiated creatively, as I suggest in the subsequent analysis of my own films.

Exemplary of defining approaches are *Monster* (Jenkins, 2003) and *Aileen Wuornos* (Broomfield, 1993). They can be considered in relation to their similarities in research and content, and the different results from their approaches to the same theme. Both films share a subject that their authors

approached out of close motivations, telling the story of Wuornos, but adopting different challenges in its telling, making a fiction film or a documentary. The two films are shaped by different sets of constraints and negotiations, some of which determine whether the film turns into a documentary or a work of fiction, influencing their form and character. As Elster affirms, “the process of artistic creation is guided by the aim of maximizing aesthetic value under constraints”, and even more relevantly, “creativity is the ability to succeed in this endeavor”.¹⁸⁶ The choice of constraints and the manner of their negotiation into a documentary is a creative task.

As the conclusions of Elsaesser, Elster and Hjørt hint, a film’s achievements can be reverse engineered to explore the motives that inspired it, by following and analysing the creative input deployed in the film’s making. With these ideas in mind I produced in sequence three experimental films (and two extra iterations for comparison submitted in an appendix): *Mechanising the Catch*, *Filling the Gaps* and *Loulabelle’s Café*. What links the three otherwise diverse films is their conception: all three were designed with obstructions in mind. Some of their self-imposed constraints are shared but each one has their own particular ones. Some of these constraints, as in von Trier’s film, were successfully negotiated, some were amended, and some were abandoned or remained unfulfilled. The films’ final forms are influenced by these obstructions and that relationship is at the centre of this study.

Imposing creative constraints as a practical method of inquiry

Although I was also motivated by the desire to retain control and study how that could be managed, my efforts are at the opposite end of the scale from the authors considered by Elsaesser: I work alone (making easier the task of looking into creative input and motivations) and with near zero budgets. In addition, my films have relatively small ambitions. They are primarily instruments in my attempt to understand how I exercise authorial control, the role of creative input in my work and to achieve a better understanding of documentary making. The films were targeted primarily to the academic circle because of their part in this thesis. *Filling the Gaps* is being presented to festivals and to peer-reviewed publications, which should provide feedback about the research and the film from the wider documentary field.

My films do not attempt to make significant statements about topical issues, though on reflection they perhaps suggest some evidence of these. On the surface, the films can be described by their apparent narrative, i.e. how a port handles a fish catch (*Mechanising the Catch*), how imagination intervenes in the making and reading of a film's ideas (*Filling the Gaps*), or how working women and men relate in a café (*Lulabelle's Café*). Beyond these simple descriptions they show my attempt to reflect on documentary as a film mode. The choice of creative constraints can be said to start with the choice of mode, to make the film not a fictional fantasy or reflection, but a documentary. Other creative constraints, like limiting the production of *Mechanising the Catch* to the social

media Vine format, or producing a film unresearched, as in *Loulabelle's Café*, are self-imposed constraints with creative consequences. In the following paragraphs I comment on the particular constraints of each film.

The creative constraints approach is in tune with Vaughan's strategies or Bruzzi's analysis of the filmmaker's negotiation, developed by filmmakers and documentarists to overcome the unavoidable gap between reality and representation. In my research they serve both as creative motivation and as method for creative analysis. I identified particular self-imposed constraints, introducing them in the design of each film's production in order to follow their impact on the negotiation of reality into representation and, for a creative input analysis, enabling a clearer link between authorial intention, formal approaches to resolving constraints and the films' final forms. What links the three films is the creative process of transforming intentions into forms. The nature of these self-imposed constraints is looked at in more detail in the analysis of each film below. Some of the constraints imposed include: striving to cede the spectator as much agency and possibility for interpretation as possible; assuming Direct Cinema-like non-intervention tactics to look into the difficulties these pose, possible solutions or workarounds, and their effect on the film's final form, to name but a few.

The idea that there is a mode of documentary *viewing* suggests a requirement for documentarists to show that their films *are* documentaries, signposting or evidencing to the viewer their film's relationship with events. Recording directly

from the real – referred to as actuality – is the simplest and most convincing of all signposts; it is what gives news and documentaries credibility. Fulfilling this requirement to signal a particular mode of viewing is a constraint of documentary filmmaking (yet actuality is not the only approach possible, as animated documentaries show). The impossibility of reproducing reality – instead making representative records from a particular perspective and focal point, and their subsequent interpretation – is arguably the constraint with the most effect on documentary making. As Bruzzi notes, “the pact between documentary, reality and the documentary spectator is far more straightforward than many theorists have made out: documentary will never be reality nor it will erase or invalidate that reality by being representational”.¹⁸⁷ Bruzzi’s assertion is an acknowledgement and acceptance of both documentary’s and the film medium’s constraints, not always present in critical debates, demanding engagement with them rather than disguising or excusing them. This was the case with practices like Direct Cinema, which attempted to simplify documentary assemblage and minimise intervention, in turn employing creativity to hide what they wanted to deny: documentary construction.

Three films, constraints and creative analysis

Mechanising the Catch

Mechanising the Catch could be described as a very simple, bare-bones documentary. It is based on interviews recorded with Viçent, a member of

Peñíscola's fishing guild in a Spanish Mediterranean seaport, a descendant of fishermen, hired by the guild when aged 18 to conduct fish sale auctions. Viçent recounts the changes and advantages brought to the guild members by the mechanisation and digitalisation of the port's facilities. Investment in technology has meant improved working conditions as well as facilitating the processing of larger catches. While the background to the film has wide social, political and economic ramifications – sustainability, the survival of traditional crafts and the environment – the film makes no attempt to underline those. Instead, it isolates short instances, portraying the ease with which the catch landed at the port is sorted to benefit guild members. Its simple narrative and uncomplicated forms are in part consequences of the obstructions or constraints imposed on its production.

The first constraint imposed on this film and common to all three productions is an attempt to cede the spectator agency and maximise the possibility for interpretation. The three films also share how they were recorded: production was restricted to one main camera, used in combination with a back-up sports camera (a GoPro™), an on-camera gun microphone and a radio microphone. The simplicity of this operation gave certain advantages but imposed certain limitations or constraints on each of the films.

Mechanising the Catch, like my other films, has no voice-over narration, another self-imposed constraint. This serves to encourage conceptual combinations, as discussed on chapter one, between the elements (each Vine), as the

documentary's narrative is constructed by the viewer. Unlike linear edits, because of the lack of predetermined order and relation between the elements, the aim is that this encouragement will become evident through its modular form. Scripted narration can precede a film, dictating what needs to be filmed or re-written, taking into account existing actuality to aid in building up the film's discourse. Often the two approaches coexist, leading the film by scripting and correcting the script, following the captured actuality, as is the case in my practice. For my films, with the exception of *Loulabelle's Café* of the accompanying films, I wrote a sketchy script with initial ideas and researched them. I welcome surprises recording actuality; these often become opportunities encouraging creative input. However, I made the effort to stick to the controlling ideas that motivated each documentary, although sometimes better aspects revealed themselves as production advanced and ideas become clearer and more focused. Seeing their potential is also a creative task.

My first steps include identifying possible collaborators who can tell the story. This can be someone I ask for an interview or groups of people who may be asked to contribute as production progresses. When it is not possible to record video, I take sound recordings to extend the available actuality for the production. In any case, in the three films I tried to collect enough material to be able to thread the story without the aid of narration, to convey a mood or allow people to come across as I understand they would like to. I strove to overcome the absence of narration visually, via visual development, testimony, rhythm, colour, texture, mise en scène and other stylistic resources. Another reason to

exclude narration was to encourage reflection about documentary; instead of spelling out the film's aims, I try to maximise spectators' involvement in creative interpretation.

Mechanising the Catch is presented in two forms, an interactive documentary and an alternative linear edited version, included in the appendix for comparison. Its standard linear form presents the location, a picturesque village on the shores of the Mediterranean and its port by the side of the isthmus formed by the town's medieval castle. The interactive form, which I refer to in the following lines unless indicated, does the same to a degree, but because of the effect of the constraints imposed on the interactive documentary, it has no pre-determined narrative development or length. The port and its workers' work habits are introduced by Viçent. He talks about working conditions at the port before mechanisation, how physical and time consuming their work was, and how technological improvements introduced in 2000 changed the way they work and live. The film has a simple structure, typical of TV magazine or news features. It is organised around interview sections which shape its narrative. These give the film credibility. Commentary is interspersed with images of the location. The catch is followed from the boat, through the auction room and onto a lorry to be transported to market. The recording of both versions took place on location in December 2014.

The film's overall proposition is simple: to show the improved ease with which the catch makes it from boat to road transport. I deemed it less important to find

an original approach to the film's theme as it was intended as an experiment in fitting documentary to a predetermined online social media video format and in consequence of this in constructing a documentary with the minimum possible. I judged that the simpler the film, the clearer would be the consequences of the obstructions or constraints I had imposed. To the main obstruction, that is, ceding agency and opportunity for interpretation, I added the obstruction of giving the viewer editorial agency and possibilities for creative exploration, which in turn pointed at using digital media and interactivity. For this I used the affordances of the Internet, making use of social media short video services. Although there is a cascading of influences and consequences from every choice of constraints, the latter had a deeper influence on the film's forms. Given the choices available at the time of production, I selected the most extreme in formal imposition: Vine. Vines are ultra-short videos that play looped, uploaded to Vine.co via a proprietary application, VineApp, by members of the public. Vines have a capped length of six seconds and are shot on smartphones. The intention of the severity of this obstruction was to adapt documentary mode and forms to shapes and forms they don't naturally adopt, to test whether emerging media forms could serve documentary, and to observe the influence such formal imposition might have on the mode. Overall, the introduction of such constraints forced reflection on what makes a documentary.

Vine.co was a commercial start-up bought by Twitter in October 2012, but the service was later dropped because it failed to commercially justify investments and costs. A number of small, medium and large corporations, like General

Electric, used it to produce sleek adverts of very small digital size that could easily be embedded in websites and apps destined for mobile devices like tablets and smartphones. The app uptake was initially fast and widespread, occasionally reaching the most downloaded free app in Apple's App Store. Yet, probably because of the difficulty of producing a meaningful, complete message in six seconds, acceptance of the app and its distribution wasn't of the scale as other popular apps offering videoclip or video-message services (WhatsApp or Pinterest). Producing a message in six seconds, a full sentence rather than just an exclamation mark, to use a semantic simile, takes careful planning, accurate timing and detailed editing. It takes at best the same if not more effort, and requires more accuracy, than a similar message stretching to a more comfortable length.

Nevertheless, those who embraced the app as viewers were sometimes treated to ingenious short messages ranging in genre/mode from comedy to animation. Vine's popularity was determined by the number of times a looped video cycled. Notwithstanding some professionally produced Vines, a staggering number of messages were produced and uploaded via the app that could better be described as moving photographs with sound. Many entries featured occasional micro-versions of home cinema or clever home-made animations. Vine is an example of what Wu¹⁸⁸ interprets as commercialisation or monetisation of the public's attention, but being commercially unsuccessful, it was doomed to disappear. The original set of micro-documentaries I produced as Vines can still be found online (at <https://vine.co/u/1040243376370397184?mode=grid>), as

Twitter continues to maintain the pages. The standard edit of the Vine film I produced can be found in the digital appendix to this thesis, a short documentary film titled after the name given in Spain to the port's fish markets, *La Lonja*.

The other important aspect of Vine.co was that it lacked, or more precisely never acquired, an Application Program Interface (API). APIs are software programmes that allow applications to interact with other apps. Although expected, Vine.co never got around to publishing one. This kind of software comprises protocols and rules, with different functionalities for different applications. To give an illustrative example, an API could facilitate the retrieval of all Vines tagged #micro-documentary and #Peñíscola, and dynamically embed them in a web page or mobile app in a prescribed order. An API would have allowed the search, retrieval and manipulation of Vine instances, by tag, name, geo-location or other metadata, enhancing their usefulness. A Vine recorded and uploaded at Peñíscola by tourists or locals could have been dynamically added to a page enquiring about the port's activities via geotagging. Or it could have been aggregated along with other Vines about commercial fishing, environmental issues related to the sea or other topics of associated interest. It is this ability to dynamically search, retrieve and manipulate media as data that gives digital new media a defining characteristic.

Mechanising the Catch is a non-linear narrative i-doc that could be described as a database documentary; it shows aspects of three of the four main i-doc

modes Gaudenzi proposes.¹⁸⁹ It has conversational aspects in that, to explore it, the viewer/user has to dialogue with the computer by selecting and setting the videos to play and stop their loops, positioning the viewer “as ‘in conversation’ with the computer”.¹⁹⁰ The Vine page where they are displayed orders them in reverse chronological order to their uploading but, as was initially intended, has no navigation, instructions or summaries describing what the collection of videos are or their connection. Ideally, had the Vines been able to be retrieved dynamically, they would have been displayed in random order, still presented to the potential viewer without navigation or instructions.

Mechanising the Catch could also be considered ‘hypertextual’ because it gives the viewer the chance to explore through pre-existent assets. It is participative as it counts on the intervention of the user to access micro-documentaries. The most significant aspect is the collaborative nature and agency given to the viewer, who is no longer placed in the collective act of spectating. Rather, as the singular user of a computer program, the user is granted a part in the authorship of her/his experience of the documentary. Brian Winston says of i-docs, and more precisely about their makers, that “i-docs are the work of filmed/filmer or filmer/audience or filmed/filmer/audience hybrids”.¹⁹¹ The author is also curator and co-director, setting up scenarios that, to a degree, free “the author from forcing a point of view onto his audience”.¹⁹² Hudson argues “that database documentaries loosen assumptions about documentary” and invite a conceptual shift from “object-based ‘push’ media [...] towards act-based ‘pull’ media”.¹⁹³ The program user actively participates in the creation of meaning.

Feedback from viewers presented with the Vines, but given no navigation, nearly always commented on their brevity, having allowed the looping ultra-shorts to run several times. Most viewers were unfamiliar with Vine.co and Vine videos. Deliberately, *Mechanising the Catch* offers no navigation other than the presence of thumbnails representing each Vine through one of its frames, usually the first frame. Digital media users expect some sort of navigation. The collection of thumbnails served as such but it is only through exploration that the viewer realises this. This underlines the importance of the interface and navigation in i-docs, and raise questions about formal development in documentary: the increasing influence of the digital will encourage the creation of new conventions as they populate different screens.

There are two approaches to using Vine in my documentary. The first tries to cover the entire span of the documentary story, i.e. the transition of the catch from boat to transport van (blob:<https://vine.co/d47d8459-412c-d842-bad2-c19dedc4314b>) treating one Vine as an entire documentary. A second approach treats each Vine as part of a documentary, but in a contained format designed to signpost to the viewer watching other parts or Vines of the documentary. The latter interactive Vine demands the viewer's involvement to piece closer together some sequential sequences more habitually expected of documentaries. Producing a documentary on Vine.co and through Vines challenges the viewer in relation to their expectations about documentaries, as became clear when I presented *Mechanising the Catch* to viewers for testing.

My findings from the response to my Vine documentary suggest viewers found the short length of the cultural form counterintuitive. They expected some sort of exposition and proposition to inform or challenge their knowledge. Yet it is accepted as 'a documentary', probably because of the welcoming attitude towards new habits forming with the use of digital media and the Internet. This is an experiment I would like to continue with different objectives: this experiment's objective was to see how I could fit a documentary into Vine and test my response and the formal consequences on the documentary; a re-run of a similar experiment would benefit from the experience acquired, and could be made with a more involving narrative to better test user/audience response. A more interesting film with a less taxing format could be produced to test creative proposals making it more encouraging for the viewer/user to remain in the viewing cycle. This will also make interesting an inquiry into the compromises arising from incentivising the viewer to keep searching in the database and the forms and role of navigation for the analysis of new possibilities in constructing representation of realities.

If a Vine documentary makes different demands on its viewers, it also makes different demands on its maker: the need to reflect on what must be included in a micro-documentary or in a documentary comprised of ultra-shorts (Vines). It forces reflection about what is understood as documentary and an author's interpretation, and consideration of audience expectations. The intention behind remediating documentary to Vine was not to experiment with form artistically to achieve unexpected results, as a painter might by commencing an intuitive

search for forms with paint on canvas for an abstract work, but to experiment with form as format. I wanted to pare documentary down to its minimal expression by attempting to fit it in a format and distribution platform it doesn't 'naturally' fit into, to stretch the interpretation of documentary forms to their limit and force reflection on our understanding of documentary itself. The process involved producing a very simple documentary, formally standard, to see if it would fit Vine's demands (six seconds length, square screen ratio and low digital file weight), but still remain recognisable as documentary.

Relevant to my attempt to consider 'creative constraints', Vine users developed and employed hacks that allowed a wider degree of options for Vine editing and uploading. A popular one was a plug-in or extension for Google's proprietary browser Chrome, named VineClient. The extension facilitated amongst other things uploading a video directly to Vine.co from a desktop computer. It is significant that having accepted the constraints of a format like Vine, resistance was then attempted – the constraints stimulated efforts to bypass them – as Elsaesser notices of artists' in his 'Global Auteur' essay. VineClient allowed for editing on a computer, easier and more accurate than what is possible on a mobile phone. It also meant the possibility of using the same filming procedures as in other films to then edit and convert to Vine before uploading. Twitter finally retired its support for Vine in October 27, 2016, disabling uploads. In January 2017 Twitter launched a portal archive of all Vines where they can still be watched, now relics of an end-of-the-line remediation.

Vine documentaries

In *Ulysses Unbound* Jon Elster recounts a story attributed to Ernest Hemingway. The story tells of Hemingway boasting about being able to write a novel or tell a compelling story in six words. The story went: “For sale: baby shoes. Never worn.”¹⁹⁴

A Vine is the film or video equivalent. Producing a six-second documentary for a square screen presented several challenges. Although the documentary was shot using a 16:9 screen ratio, this needed to be done bearing in mind the consequent trim to square format. The first tentative trials were made using a mobile phone, and highlighted several inconveniences like file archiving and video quality. Some of my early tests for Vine on a phone can be seen on the Vine page containing the micro-documentaries. However, editing and uploading using VineClient allowed the use of video camera and a personal computer, a license that partially broke the constraint of using Vine.co, though not of using VineApp.

After two previous visits to ascertain permissions, shooting stretched over two winter days. Editing tests began a few weeks later. There were technical specifications needing adjustment, pertaining to screen ratio, codecs and file types relative to their later uploading to Vine.co, otherwise, the steps before editing remained as usual: shot selection, classification, transcripts and shortlists. The first efforts were tentative and proved to be more difficult to

achieve than anticipated. I drew on previous experiences working with editors on 'cut-downs' of TV commercials, which are thirty-second commercials re-edited to ten seconds and used as 'poster' reminders, placed in media after thirty-second versions have already run. Vine's redeeming feature, however, is the possibility for looping their exhibition, allowing the viewer to watch a Vine repeatedly in continuous succession and stop as convenient after an interpretation is internalised.

For this reason, the paramount creative considerations for selection and editing were brevity and clarity of meaning. An initial editing procedure was to select six-second shots, convert them into Vines, allowing the viewer to watch them in the order of their choice, thereby making their own documentary version.

Although this would have fulfilled the first obstruction perfectly, on reflection I decided that a collection of shots hardly makes a documentary, as they can be interpreted just as footage still to be assembled into a documentary. Therefore, I believed this first plan did not work; it was not an acceptable response to the formulated constraint. Each Vine or ultra-short needed to be a documentary, or as close an approximation as possible. To fulfil the constraint each Vine demanded not just shot selection and editing but documentary intention and, consequentially, a signalling to the viewer that they were watching a documentary. For this it needed the intentional connection of the footage, if minimally, to shared cultural values, suggesting it is a documentary, and thus demanding it be watched in documentary mode.

Of the 27 micro-documentaries or ultra-shorts I uploaded to Vine.co, the first three were my initial attempts deemed fit for uploading. They describe how the catch is unloaded from boats onto carts and then onto transport belts which take the crates into the auction room. There, brokers bid for the lots with a remote-control system; details of a bid show on an electronic board, keeping a record of buyers and prices paid. Finally, the lot is ticketed and loaded onto carts for distribution. It takes longer to describe than to watch the ultra-short. Each of the three was a progressively improved version of the same linear story. For simplicity, these Vines had sound but contained no narration.

The first conclusions drawn from this exercise were immediately interesting. Vine's looping meant that once started the video does not stop on reaching its end; it replays from the beginning over and over again until stopped by the viewer. Such a facility helps the viewer to watch until they interpret or understand (or lose interest in) the micro-documentary. My first effort uploaded on the 23rd of March 2015 had 14 camera set-ups and 14 cuts. That is, more than two scenes per second. While editing I am at a disadvantage in judging its readability, because I know the footage and witnessed the scene at Lonja (the wholesale fish market at the port). I cannot see it with the same state of mind, fresh to its content and meanings, as other viewers do once it is edited and published. My previous knowledge and understanding also hampers my ability to judge its clarity for others.

The edited Vine was shown to peers at the University and outside the University environment to volunteers, to gather responses about comprehension, interpretation and whether, as I was expectant to find out, if they would relate it to their understanding of documentary. In other words, to test if my interpretation of documentary through Vine would still fit our shared cultural idea of the film mode in such a shorthand, stripped-down version and recognised, in the wider cultural sense as a documentary. The responses suggested spectators were more familiar than I had assumed with watching, decoding and interpreting very short sequences lasting only a few seconds, probably because short montages are frequently used in contemporary film and television. Any expectation that Vines could be watched and understood on a single loop of six seconds, however, was, in most instances, optimistic. Simple edits received approval, generally only after watching several loops, suggesting six seconds is too uncomfortable and demanding, underlining the importance of the looping. Allowing the video loop, acceptance of such short videos happened faster than I anticipated. Viewers felt the first Vine of fourteen scenes was too fast paced, complicating comprehension, and needing more loops to grasp the story. But a nine-cut version shown immediately after was deemed a substantial improvement. It is difficult to compare and assess how long the same sequence would last when edited in a habitual linear fashion; it would probably extend into minutes. The project highlights the assumptions I make basing criteria on experience; the time allowed for an edit or a shot to be read/interpreted is a creative guess. Looping video proved to be key, allowing a better chance to discern possible interpretations. Together with experience, creative ability has

great influence: a good editor would need less time and fewer shots, making brevity their ally in capturing the spectator's attention and enabling their understanding. Subsequent edits of the same scenes were shortened down to 12 (Vine uploaded 24th March) and 9 (Vine uploaded 25th March, two days after first). The third edit tells the same story but uses a different selection of shots and fewer of them. It improved the reading speed counted in loops; it seemed a good compromise between speed, number of scenes and readability, and most importantly, contrasted to my cultural understanding of documentary and its interpretation by viewers, it closely enough resembled a complete documentary in six seconds. The Vine offered the viewer a complete, if simple documentary and story. The effort to decoding the story is, in all probabilities harder than if it was a minute or two long, yet the satisfaction of recognising the Vine purpose and understanding the developments portrayed by the narrative in such a short time, if rather simple and in telegram format, were noted by many offered to watch the Vine.

During the interviews I asked Viçent to try to stick to short, simple answers, in tune with the approach to an uncomplicated documentary and the need to elicit short answers for use in Vine's six-second edits. He spoke quickly and clearly, as he was used to doing in auctions. But although he was concise and articulate, his replies stretched longer than six seconds. At the time of recording I hoped that I would be able to isolate sentences in the cutting room. Sentences within six seconds served as the interview shots. Other phrases, expressions, pauses and subordinate clauses needed editing to avoid jump-cuts. These

jumps were disguised under cutaways, as is common practice. There are other possible solutions, like fading to black, but in the context of using Vine, fades and other edit devices take time.

In contrast to the Vine that portrays the entire journey of the catch, the rest, as discussed, were edited as parts of a larger documentary to be offered to the user/viewer in an explorable database. The six-second ultra-shorts structure gives the documentary a particular relationship between its parts: no six-second sequence or sentence has a fixed link to any other via editing. The spectator chooses which sequence to watch, creating a personal montage and connections between the shorts. Any Vine chosen at random would give an idea about one of the aspects addressed in Peñíscola's *Lonja*. Since the edit is open and the next Vine and narrative discourse would be of the viewer's choice, the connections are for the viewer to establish, fulfilling the second constraint: ceding editing agency to the viewer. The permutation of elements would ensure each spectator watched a slightly different documentary. The experiment in ceding authorship control and heightening spectator agency suggests the possibility that interpretations are determined in part by the viewer's involvement and intervention. A degree of shared authorship seems possible, modifying the relative positions between author and viewer/co-author, yet, ultimately, the author's intervention, guidance and direction, together with the circumstances of exhibition, prevail. As consequence of the author's creative decisions authorial control is in great part predetermined in the selection, order and importance of narrative and formal elements later on offer to the spectator.

The mix of ideas, motivations and creative execution fixed into the database unavoidably place the viewer in a perspective which the author has set up; however, interactivity gives opportunity to share part of the authorship via viewing/editing.

The documentary was conceived as a donation to the Fishermen's Guild and Peñíscola's Museo del Mar. In that context, viewers who had already visited either the port or the museum might feel more inclined to watch several Vines without indication of what information each contains, manufacturing their own personal documentary in which they participate in editing and uniquely experience its particular decoding. Viewer involvement extends the possibilities of interpretation and agency. An initial ambitious idea for the documentary was to, eventually, encourage visitors to record Vines and tag them accordingly in order for these recordings to add to the pool of possible Vines about the Lonja and its activities. These would be retrieved to a page or application by their tag or metadata information and displayed in connection to similarly themed Vines, in response to viewers' queries. These would have extended the possibilities of sharing authorship, at the same time lessen placing the viewer on a perspective of the author, as mentioned above. A facility like this would turn the tables, giving every viewer the opportunity to become co-author, but with the lack of API and the ceasing of activities at Vine.co, it became impossible to upload new Vines and very difficult to access them dynamically.

Mechanising the Catch can be classified as a database documentary and an interactive i-doc. However, the possibilities to extend part of the authorship of the documentary to visitors to the Lonja or museum were unfortunately curtailed when Twitter decided to terminate the Vine video service. In spite of this, I consider the experiment and the Vine documentary a success. It threw up a pertinent challenge, that is, constructing an approximation to documentary to fit a restrictive formal constraint; the exercise invited and demanded a reflection on the nature and characteristics of documentary for the author, and hopefully perhaps also for some of its viewers.

On first approach the documentary and the documentary's Vines could be seen as predominantly observational. My intention was to make the documentary, in its totality as well in each of its constituent parts, each micro-documentary, to be reflexive overall. The intention, other than telling a story about the Lonja and its workers in an original way, was to encourage the spectator to question the reasons a documentary was made up of several six-second smaller documentaries that are complementary. There is no story thread other than the one each viewer makes in accessing a sequence of Vines; there is no beginning or end, or fixed length, and not all its parts are strictly necessary: each spectator takes out as much as their curiosity prompts them to. They were intended to be documentaries about documentary, as reflexivity was also at the heart of this and the two other films I made.

The micro-documentaries include sound recorded directly. Managing sound needed careful consideration because of the very short time of each shot. The diegetic sound recorded, once edited, often jumps abruptly from shot to shot, creating a distracting staccato effect, underlining their brevity. Conventionally, documentary films' sound is often recorded directly in contrast with fiction films that make extensive use of music, dubbing, sound design and foley. The use of foley or sound design helps clarity. On the short edits of Vines, which are too short to add more than a few music notes, a riff or drone sets the mood and adds colour; it is complicated and difficult to make this work. Initial attempts to introduce music, in the hope of it acting as a unifying element across all shots, were not successful. It is a common editing strategy to create unity of space or time via diegetic running music, or occasionally diegetic background sound over several cuts. Introducing a single riff proved repetitive as the short videos loop. Drone notes were difficult to sync at the loop turn, producing an off-putting broken record effect and calling attention to the jump from the end back to the beginning. The absence of an API made any plans to add music dynamically difficult in Vines with partial or total lack of sound as they loop. The shorts containing interviews and speech easily became too busy. Ultimately the raw original sound belonging to the sync audio video recording on most of the Vine was left in place, although some were left without sound to avoid artificiality. To give an example, seascapes and long shots have little or no sound because the sound recorded was not related to what is seen on screen. As they were filmed the mic captured sounds of traffic, passing tourists who are not in view and wind

blowing. Silence seemed more in keeping with the shots than noise from unseen sources.

Nevertheless, sound transitions are possible in Vines, and often necessary.

There are transitions, for example, on nearly all of the Vines with interviews to isolate Viçent's voice from the natural recorded sound of adjoining shots. Here, conspicuous for its absence, is the common sound-editing feature mentioned earlier, used to give uniformity to shots that might not be originally related. The contrary is illustrated in the film uploaded 25th March showing the transit of fish from the boats to the dispatch transport bay. Featuring nine cuts, there is no time for sound transitions to smooth the ambient sound, thereby the staccato effect mentioned is produced: sound jumps underlining visual jumps. This could easily have been replaced by fizzing sea or waves SFX, syncopated with seagulls and the distant rumble of workplace activity. This would have sounded natural to the ear and would have given the montage unity, setting a calmer pace, concentrating the viewer's attention on the visual. It would also have unified the location. But such editing would have been contrary to the self-imposed constraints: to cede agency to the viewer and to highlight documentary construction. This illustrates the paradox by which constructive intervention like replacing diegetic sound with convenient recordings serves to disguise construction.

When I film, I operate a main camera and, if possible, deploy an additional sports camera. These types of cameras have fixed lenses, near infinite focus

from about a foot from the sensor plane and a wide-angle view. Although their footage is often difficult to match with that of cinema-like lenses, they are invaluable for someone shooting alone as I was. Such footage can be used to add dynamism and filmic character with short match-cuts or cut-in-action, giving actuality footage a more filmic character. There are three shots from a sports camera on *Mechanising the Catch*: the shot of the auction theatre, and aerial shots of crates and a trolley loaded with crates being pushed through the neon light illuminating Lonja after the auction. (This shot is the last cut of the film *La Lonja* available in the ‘Digital Files’ appendix.)

Considering the film linearly, i.e. edited continuously and not broken into smaller units, there is a logical and fixed story in time and space. The earlier Vines replicate this – those Vines could be seen as a six-second interpretations of the film *La Lonja*, available in the appendix, although the Vine preceded *La Lonja*’s long linear edit. The same structure repeats but broken into 27 Vines, comprised of ultra-shorts, including Viçent’s commentary elaborating the different stages of their work. The Vines are not categorised; no navigation or index is offered in order to fulfil the constraint premise and cede agency to the viewer, thereby avoiding leading the experience into a preconceived order as a linear edit would do. Unavoidably, their position on the Vine page would suggest an order, but no order was intended. Their uploading order they inherit was not related to their content. Only the colour and style of the display thumbnails hint to the viewer as to the relationship between edits. As Odorico, O’Flinn or Gaudenzy comment ¹⁹⁵, interactive documentaries placed the viewer

in a different perspective. Actively selecting and watching Vines and the individual differences it creates for interpretation contrast to watching its linear counterpart *La Lonja*, where they have a degree of agency for interpretation, equally conditioned by the fixed edit for all spectators but giving them no other role. In addition, cognitive science argues motivation to be a factor in creative interpretation and it can be presumed that the motivation of interacting with the documentary possibly contribute to enhancing the viewer's experience. In *La Lonja* the perspective, the relationship between author, content and spectator is fixed. Although the content of the i-doc is similar, it gives the viewer choice to navigate, determine length and opportunity to link, and more importantly, gives them more agency to interpret the links between elements of the documentary.

Constraining the film to six-second micro-documentaries allows for interesting observations about the documentary mode and forms. The micro-documentaries could be situated in a post-digital, post-convergence new aesthetic attempting to explore the possibilities of the digital. This experimental film challenges the mode and its forms by forcing them into such a non-obvious format for documentary, reducing their length to a minimum, breaking up linearity, atomising into a series of micro-documentaries with the potential to compose them into a larger overall documentary, and proposing a different way to releasing this potential to the spectator. An example of this arose on the first test viewing I made of the ultra-shorts, related to the long take championed by many critics and filmmakers, including Leth, as he makes clear in *The Five Obstructions*. Within the micro-documentaries, some of the takes are

significantly longer than others, and were perceived as long takes. Their length was dictated by the need to show an action or break the pace and give a modulated cadence. Although there cannot really be long takes in six seconds, some takes stand out for their contrast in duration, with the looping iteration further reinforcing the effect. André Bazin championed the use of long takes in documentary, reducing intervention to better allow spectator interpretation and preserve the relationship of space and time in the shot, thus implying lack of construction.¹⁹⁶ The short span of a six-second loop where a shot can be identified as a long take suggests an alternative interpretation to Bazin's long take ideas: an emphasis on the contrast of shot lengths in the edit to suggest the paradoxical coexistence in the ultra-short of two ideas, long take *and* montage. In other words, with the short length of a Vine only minimal intervention is possible and when documentary conventions are forced into such a short duration, they take on different meanings or allow for different interpretations than in more usual edits. It also suggests a possible review of Bazin's idea where space and length are relative terms modulated to the overall edit pace and not absolutes and hence the opportunities for intervention, interpretation and the preservations of space and time to also be relative.

Rhetorical development is complicated by brief length and the fragmentation of the film in small units like the tiles of a mosaic to be joined. Individual Vines giving the spectator the choice to sequence and determine when to finish, letting the spectator determine the final composition, makes the possibility of complex predetermined build-ups difficult. Storytelling devices like switches,

flashbacks and other cinematic figures are just not possible (or very difficult to achieve). The time fragmentation suggests on one hand a cubist approach where simple parts of the storyline are offered, sometimes repeated with slightly shifted angles, yet maintaining a sense of unity and meaning; on the other hand, the opposite: the autonomy of constituent parts and the spectator's ability to choose randomly, thus forcing a distancing from the story and highlighting construction. As the story is pursued, the aggregation of Vines becomes a memory image that never existed until created by the viewer in her or his imagination, particular to him or her.

Renov argues that the documentary idiom "is the one that most actively promotes the illusion of immediacy".¹⁹⁷ Breaking a documentary into small constituent parts offers at once involvement and a distancing from the screen and from possible connections suggested by the author. In my film's production I made every effort to achieve an immersive experience, employing film craft, pursuing immediacy, signalling its witnessing of a recorded slice of reality and authenticating its fictionalisation to support its claim to documentary status. This is then broken into parts, fragmented into fleeting flashes long enough to, at best, allow interpretation, but as a consequence creating distance rather than immersion in a system pursuing realism. The realism tactics of each ultra-short, and the group as a whole, are relegated to secondary consideration by the syncopation created by the contrast of one Vine with another and by the hurried edits. Like the montages of Eisenstein and the Soviets, attention is pulled away from the photographic image to the possible meanings readable in the

sequence. The fragmentation acts as a distancing mechanism and helps fulfil the intention to make the viewer aware of documentary construction.

Boden argues that usefulness is a characteristic, if not a telling sign, of the concurrence of creativity. According to her types of creativity, *Mechanising the Catch*'s production and creative input could be deemed exploratory and to a degree transformational. The production emerged from a collision of ideas. The proposal questioned what would happen to documentary if put through the formal constraints of new social media forms, in particular Vine and its extreme format. As Boden suggests, "creative achievements" can "result from exploring conceptual spaces in systematic and imaginative ways".¹⁹⁸ The production treats creatively my culturally acquired concept of documentary, rather than just treating creatively documentary forms. In other words, and paraphrasing Boden, I explore the edges of documentary's conceptual structural space.¹⁹⁹ This exploration pursues a transformational creative treatment of the documentary mode by stretching the notion of what Arthur called "the practices commonly indexed as documentary".²⁰⁰ *Mechanising the Catch* represents the documentary re-mediated into new media forms and formats that are not an obvious destination or logical progression for the mode, in an attempt at what Edward De Bono would call lateral thinking.²⁰¹ The step had unsuspected results; first of all the realisation that six seconds are enough to display aspects of the widely shared idea of, as Arthur summarises their diversity, the practices indexed as documentary. Just like Hemingway's baby shoes story, ultra-shorts can be complete and compelling. Whether the present film is compelling is

debatable, yet I am satisfied with it and it is a good first step in exploring interactive documentaries and working playfully with documentary as a shared cultural form. As Boden recommends, I leave its evaluation to the field.

There is another aspect of ultra-short video usefulness: curiosity-driven research, as was championed by Abraham Flexner and still is by Dijkgraaf, who encourages arts research to concentrate on curiosity and research itself.²⁰²

Mine might be the first Vine documentary and the last one, yet I enjoyed the experience of devising, making and learning from these Vines about documentary, creativity and my practice. Tracing a documentary's ideas and its creative processes help illuminate these efforts and aid in their analysis.

Creative input directs the assemblage of a film's parts to present them as if they always belonged together.

Filling the Gaps

Filling the Gaps represents a different approach to signalling to the spectator the structure and construction within a film, and to drawing attention to creativity and performance. It is also a creative exercise in metaphorical, logical and ideational contiguity, about which I will elaborate and explain, although it is when viewing the film that this becomes obvious. The film explicitly addresses the influence of creative input in an artistic piece of work and the need for imagination in the making so that it is understood. It recounts the story of Albrecht Dürer's engraving 'The Rhinoceros' (1515).



Figure 3: Dürer's 1515 Engraving 'The Rhinoceros' in a frame from *Filling the Gaps*.

Having never seen a rhino and only working from a short description, together with sketches from another artist (now lost), Dürer completed an engraving depicting a rhinoceros, a creature then unseen in Europe and whose imagery had previously been the exclusive domain of mythology. Dürer used his masterful skills as a draughtsman and his knowledge of animal anatomy to complete the picture of a beast he had never seen. As Giulia Bartrum suggests, Dürer's art required a great deal of imagination.²⁰³ Dürer's rhinoceros is a collage of several known animal anatomies connected into an approximation of a rhino that fitted the description and sketches that circulated in Europe at the time. It is a visual game of charades of sorts, an Arcimboldo-like²⁰⁴ portrait of a rhino made up of many animal parts. Although the engraving is not a documentary it has documentary value as it was assembled from the available actuality, description and sketches, with creative input then composing the animal. It can be thought of as proto-reportage or a distant antecedent to documentation and to documentary in its process and structuration. Dürer's process show similarities to that adopted by documentary filmmakers.

In *Filling the Gaps* Dürer's rhino story is accompanied by another developing story that shows the production of a tourist map, a map of a Morocco known only through media references and, like the rhino, imaginatively pieced together. The film proposes a similarity between Dürer's use of information and imagination in completing his engraving, and the making of the tourist map based on testimony from individuals who have never been to Morocco. In *Mechanising the Catch* construction was made obvious by slicing and isolating a documentary into its fundamental and minimum elements. In this film construction is revealed through rhetoric and story, by following Dürer's logic, achieving the best possible approximation to a real phenomenon that he had not witnessed directly. This provides a metaphor for the way we approach the ideation of unknown things, including the making of documentaries. Its main constraint was to call attention to its construction and highlight the intervention of imagination in that construction. In doing so, allowing the spectator as much scope for interpretation in the relationship between Dürer's process approach, documentary and the imagined Morocco the film presents possibly enhancing the pleasures of decoding meanings in the film and the viewers' involvement. The thinking behind the constraint fits in the overall attempt to allow the spectator as much agency as possible.

The story of Dürer's rhino is simple and captivating. Bartrum's analysis in the film highlights Dürer's genius in using his skills to produce a characterful image, later shown to be close to the represented and which became a widely shared cultural image of the animal until superseded by photographs. Bartrum

comments that in the 1920s and 30s German schoolbooks still represented rhinos using Dürer's engraving.

My film offers some clues to aspects shared with the engraving. Just as Dürer had never seen a rhino, none of the film collaborators had been to Morocco. As pragmatic semioticians like Odin argue of film, *Filling the Gaps*'s meaning is intentionally not fixed in its design.²⁰⁵ The film proposes ideas in contiguity, like Dürer's solution to representing an animal he never saw in the flesh or the idea of a location only known by references, with the intention of allowing open association of these ideas. By design the film refrains from filling the gaps between its two developing stories. This could be also described as a self-imposed constraint of the film.²⁰⁶

A modified approach to Bruzzi's idea of performativity

Filling the Gaps strives to challenge what Bruzzi describes as the "assumption that documentaries aspire to be referential or 'constative'", and that they become more suggestive and performative than assertive or claiming to be evidential. My films are intended to be reflexive and, in Bruzzi's words, "concerned with represented reality [...] but more aware of the inevitable falsification or subjectification such representation entails"²⁰⁷ – and sharing this with the spectator. *Filling the Gaps* represents an enacting of this challenge: the making of a document as a metaphor for the making of a documentary.

All three of my films could be considered performative, considering Austin's ideas as embraced by Bruzzi in her definition of performative, albeit with certain allowances. In Dineen's or Broomfield's films the documentarist's enquiry is captured on camera, enacting the documentary instance as it is pursued, personified by the documentarist as she or he conducts the enquiry. In *Filling the Gaps* the evident live performance of the filmmaker is substituted by visual film development enacted in the possible ideas arising from each of the two parallel narratives. The film enunciation intends to involve the spectator in completing the performance by relating both story threads. The documentary instantiation enacted by Dineen or Broomfield has been replaced by visual development, recreating an image of Morocco, in the same way as Dürer pieced together his rhinoceros, through reference and with the intervention of the spectator's imagination. The film identifies and compares the conclusions we can draw from Dürer's working process, with the way we are able to image instances that we lack direct experience of. In the film it is ideas about Morocco expressed by the film's contributors that are illustrated in the film. Their imagined Morocco is brought to life with a mix of images to fit their descriptions. Grabbed frames from tourist videos, from Morocco or from filling-in approximations like a car boot sale in replacement for a bazaar are placed on a map as reminders, signifying the imagining of an alternative, approximate Morocco built with the actuality at hand, concerned with imaging rather than with true-to-life accuracy.

Bruzzi asserts that documentaries are at heart a performance; there are several levels of performance in *Filling the Gaps*. The British Museum part of the film highlights the performance in Dürer's engraving through Bartrum's testimony about helping to differentiate factual information in the conception of the engraving from the talent of draughtsmanship. To complete the engraving Dürer combined information he had access to and information he had accrued through hours of methodical observation and sketching of animals.²⁰⁸ He employed this knowledge to fill in the gaps in imagining the rhino. The later parts of Bartrum's analysis focus on Dürer's consummate draughtsmanship, the way his talent brings it all together with particular focus on the details to convey contemporary ideas about the rhino's reputation, helping to portray the animal in accordance with mythical beliefs, like the accounts of Pliny the Elder about its fierce character, capable of making elephants flee in fear.²⁰⁹ Dürer's adding of details portraying the beast's reputation made his engraving impactful and, crucially, marketable. His demonstrable ability to collate information and use knowledge to produce a plausible representation underlines the importance of imagination and the role of creativity. The use of imagination makes it possible to fill in knowledge gaps, enabling verified knowledge to be transformed into a plausible representation; it suggests the need for imaginative connections so that facts or actuality become meaningful.

The structure of the map storyline section is that of travelogue film, but reversed: it is not the map that precedes the place and guides the exploration but it is the exploration that draws up place and map. I also like to think of there

being a relationship between this section and the exploration of a cultural domain described by Boden, as discussed in Chapter One. It is an imaginary voyage of discovery to an unknown, distant land, without leaving one's immediate surroundings, but using excerpts from these surroundings as placeholders for an approximation of the common shared knowledge about this place. Like Dürer, the film's collaborators do not picture Morocco, but rather what they know of Morocco accessed through media and commentary. Similarly, Jill Godmilow's film *Far from Poland* (1984) could be seen as a precedent documentary, striving to represent events and places beyond an author's reach. Godmilow's film constraint is the estrangement from its subject, a constraint prompting resourceful, creative solutions and film modes and forms commonly associated with fiction film. *Filling the Gaps* also resorts to forms and modes less associated with documentary, yet its overall subject is documentary itself.

The film's first scenes show the motivation for imagining a distant place, as the film's actor hears about Morocco on the radio. Making a map enacts the piecing together of an imagined land, suggesting the connection between Dürer's ideas in completing his engraving, and putting together a communication with only second-hand knowledge and footage rather than direct knowledge and actuality. Short enacted sections like the *fakir's*, are included to challenge documentary foundations by illustrating some of the most outlandish thoughts of the collaborators, reminding us of the fallibility of testimony and memory, and questioning its accuracy. The intent is opposite to the urge to authenticate

fictionalisation, as Bruzzi maintains ²¹⁰ that realist strategies used in the documentary mode do, as these sequences illustrate imagination and daydreams. This is a constant in my work: the marriage of individuals' fantasies and documentary, using daydreamed stories as a fundamental part of the collaborator's persona. I include re-enactment of collaborators' imagined testimonies to reveal wishes, aspirations, hopes and shortcomings which would be difficult to access, capture and represent by observation or from interviews. It is the collaborators' imagined ideas about Morocco that are treated in the film. They are the equivalent to the references Dürer used to compose his rhino, borrowing from other animals. The story is the enactment of the making of an imagined approximation of Morocco, captured in a descriptive map similar in development to how Dürer composed his engraving. It is also a metaphorical description of documentary making: compiling and ordering the best actuality at hand into a coherent story, plausibly representing real events. In the process the film highlights the inescapable intervention of creativity.

Neither the commentary nor the restaurant recordings have the intention to prove wrong any images or knowledge about Morocco, much less to ridicule ideas. The film acknowledges the process of how we piece together information. These approximations are neither right nor wrong, merely defined by the available information and, critically, by the ability to weave it into representations. There is no frivolous intent in enacting Dürer's procedure. The map scenes are in marked contrast with the sobriety built up around the engraving story, relying on the character conveyed by the theatrical scenario,

the imposing museum galleries, the British Museum's reputation, and Bartrum's expert analysis and careful demeanour. Sobriety often features in documentaries as a synecdoche for the rigour of the author's ethical standards and methods. Seriousness is in part the mechanism that has helped mockumentaries build their satire, demonstrating that treatment is not a substitute for truthfulness or accuracy, and that the aspirations and promises of documentary lie elsewhere and cannot be photographed. Just as documentary can be mocked, the tacit agreement between filmmaker and spectator can be abused for satire or propaganda; the opposite – truthfulness and ethical intent – cannot be guaranteed either. It would be an error to see the *mise en scène* as a signifier of sobriety or as designed to somehow give the documentary scientific weight, but rather, like the museum, it is aimed at engendering engagement in the belief of the advantages of culture and knowledge. In contrast to the museum images, no such discourse or assurance exists in the map scenes, yet their aim is to engage in the same process of piecing information together, as in the Dürer story. The re-enactments and illustrative scenes signal the singularity of each individual, portraying their inner voices at their most intimate, when imagining and guessing.

The map story is a reflection on Dürer's methods and points to the inescapable need for imagination to bridge the gap between represented and representation and the singularity of this for the individual. This is exemplified in the film with nearly every representation of Morocco that the collaborators make – guessing dominant colours like terracotta, giving the place magical attributes, relying on

folk tales, comparisons of the local architecture – all the upshot of an imaginative association of ideas and a metaphorical imagining substituting for lack of a direct knowledge.

Making documentaries and making documentaries at the British Museum

The recording of the engraving and Bartrum's interview were filmed in one of the large rooms where researchers and aficionados can consult the print collections. The setting suits documentary's lofty aspirations: the room is imposing in size and has hardwood cabinets with glass-panelled doors from floor to ceiling. Behind them, kept in large, flat, red boxes, are prints and drawings from every era and culture. The setting tells of tradition, of revered cultural artefacts and sobriety tantamount to the methodical scientific discipline employed in their study. Bartrum's careful handling of boxes and prints is made evident in details like the use of gloves, and the care and time she takes to retrieve them from and replace them on their shelves. She personifies a cultural reverence for knowledge, also represented in the film by the location and artefacts. The large room gives the sound recording a cathedral-like character, an expressive resonance heightened by the deliberate absence of added music. In contrast with the images composing the map of Morocco, this mise en scène perfectly suits the air of sobriety that contributes to Bartrum's expert analysis of Dürer's engraving.

The interview took 30 to 40 minutes. Bartrum offers a thorough, eloquent and knowledgeable analysis and a succinct contextualisation of the rhino print. The interview was later edited, re-ordering for clarity and to allow cut-away shots to the engraving. For about half an hour after the interview I grabbed shots of the room before it closed. Outside the museum I also spent a few hours taking shots of the main south entrance and the north gate, where I was asked by a tourist to take his picture next to one of the granite lions. Later this anecdote seemed appropriate to lead into the story, hinting at its underlying media theme.

None of the museum images have music. This decision came from the idea to rely on the resonant near silence of the museum's large rooms, contributing to an atmosphere of solemnity and authority that the British Museum conveys. But great care and detailed work was needed to use available sound. It required precise editing to achieve a contained space-temporal unit. This contrasts to the map-making story, where the testimonies about Morocco and its illustrations are treated lightly to enhance the contrast. Here thematic music was added to make the journey through the imagined Morocco a little lighter and more pacy. In line with the theme, the music is a pastiche of North African music and contemporary fashions, made of mixed samples and edited with percussion. Like the Morocco portrayed in the film, the music is also imagined, reinterpreted and borrowed from Morocco and further afield; it is both original and re-invented.

With his rhino engraving Dürer intended to have an impact. The print was a way to use his talents and reputation to achieve success in the commercial art market and to compete with other artists (like Burgkmaier, whose engraving features in the film). Dürer was taking advantage of the changes that Renaissance ideas were bringing to European societies, including an avid curiosity on the part of the educated classes.²¹¹ These ideas coincided with great European journeys of discovery and the emergence of early media, including map making. It was the time of Mercator's breakthrough maps, books of engravings, like Emperor Maximilian's 'Triumphal Procession', showing people and creatures from the entire known world (by this point also including America). Movable type had been perfected in Europe half a century earlier, thus providing access to books and knowledge for growing numbers of people. Changes in the social fabric and economic fortunes brought artists new customers. Architecture was revolutionised and classical arts redirected their focus away from the church and religion to the civic and the personal. For Dürer, communicating information about the arrival of the rhino, confirming the existence of this legendary creature, as Bartrum conveys, was an opportunity to tap into the increasing popularity of prints and new patronage and wealth, so that he could fund his studio and be able to produce more complex works.

Dürer's rhino can be used to reflect on many issues relevant to aspects of media today, in particular documentary, in terms of economics, authorship and authorial authority, representation, realism strategies, and ethics. Bartrum's lucid analysis touches on several of these. Realist strategies can be seen in

Dürer's print as well as imaginative touches which help portray the beast according to its reputation. Bartrum mentions Dürer's efforts to achieve this, like the curls and horn encrustations to help the rhino look wild and dangerous. She also describes how the subject is framed close to the thin margins to make it look caged, filling the space, looking large, strong and fierce, as if poised to break away. These details suggest the beast's character beyond its visual representation and in doing so build immediacy, involving the viewer's emotions and knowledge to decode the engraving. Bartrum's description portrays Dürer's performance as much as the engraving itself, and points to his cultivation of his own reputation. His AD monogram, present in all his work, looks today more like a brand signature or a logo than the personal signature common to artists' works since the sixteenth century. Dürer's monogram represents his authorship and his authoritative assertion about the represented, his guarantee of the likeness and veracity of his representations and a statement about his reputation and work. His fame preceded his work as much as the reputations of Werner Herzog or Louis Theroux precede them, bestowing a special trustworthy status. Dürer also added a description which was circulated with the sketch, that can be read over the engraving, and this serves as the actuality underpinning the faithfulness of the reproduction. Similarly, in *Filling the Gaps*, Bartrum's interview and the museum scene underpin the accuracy and veracity of the story told in the film.

The film, however, does not develop in the order suggested above; rather it jumps from one theme to another. Its early scenes take the viewer from a man

hearing about Morocco to the seemingly unrelated scene of the outside of the British Museum and the interview about Dürer's engraving. Many films use this narrative structure, to create tension through the assumption that the two must somehow be connected. Each of the film's storylines develops its own narrative and ideas independently, with the clues or connections between them not clarified. The story of the map is made as the collaborators describe it, a documentary film of an imagined Morocco made up of a mix of images that could be of Morocco (some are, some are not). Images were recorded in shops, open markets and thematic restaurants, partly confirming viewers' imagined descriptions whilst at the same time evidencing common sources of information used to compensate for the lack of direct experience. *Filling the Gaps* is Dürer's approach put into practice, a reflection on the use of imagination and a metaphor for documentary making. Following the theme of this thesis it could be described as a reflection upon Dürer's overcoming of a constraint: his lack of direct knowledge of a rhino, and what actions and decisions he took to overcome this impediment. There are connections between the ideas each of the two narratives propose, but they are left open to the viewer's imagination. Although this might be true of all films, the lack of links between them in my film is deliberate, to comply with the overall constraint of giving as much agency as possible to the viewer. This constraint is reinforced by another of the constraints imposed on all of the films, choosing not to make use of narration.

Unlike *Mechanising the Catch*, where constraints influence aesthetic forms more evidently, forcing them to conform to the given format while complying

with making a documentary, the constraints on *Filling the Gaps* influence its narrative development and structure. The film's rhetoric is not made obvious; instead its argument is divided between contained stories which are separately developed, offering hints to, but no clear common link between them or a reason for their separation. One storyline describes the creative process and the other enacts it. Semio-pragmatic semiologists consider the ontology of a film is realised "through the process of watching a film", ²¹² its meanings determined by the spectator's interpretations. The containment of both storylines in different dialogues and the contrasting of the *mise en scène* in each are intended to encourage involvement and a response from the spectator, providing a link between the two and in doing so contribute to the film's meaning, intervening in its performance and stimulating reflection about its construction.

Cognitive semiotics speaks of the principle of relevance, the need for a balance between "contextual effect" and "processing effort".²¹³ The fewer contextual clues afforded to the viewer, or that exist previously via shared cultural knowledge, the more processing effort is needed to read and assign meaning. In the film, the separation between storylines, together with the lack of narration, demands a bigger effort and risks rejection, while at the same time widening the field of possible interpretations. Some of the possible consequences pose the interesting idea that constraining the film also constrains the viewer. Whatever the constraint accepted by the enunciator – the filmmaker – the constraint (or its consequences) is also passed on, inviting the viewer to accept and overcome it in complicity with the author, or reject it, so ending the process of collaborative

expectation. This is exemplified in Dürer's rhino. An artist who can produce a representation of known animals so detailed and accurate can speculate on the imaging of a creature unseen because his audience has also not seen a rhino and are keen to imagine one more vividly and with greater clarity than has hitherto been possible. The idea of a shared constraint, one that is accepted by the maker and passed on to the viewer, resonates with the idea of a compromise accepted by the filmmaker in producing a documentary. It acknowledges the tacit contract with the spectator particular to documentary: their adoption of a documentary mode of viewing. This contract is a form of constraint for filmmakers and their audiences alike.

Picking up again on ideas from cognitivists, the process of making *Filling the Gaps* can be compared with tactical conscious approaches to creativity. The Morocco story can be seen as 'thinking backwards' or 'turning the situation upside down', as referenced earlier, regarding proposed schemes to encourage creativity. The idea derived from Dürer's creative developmental approach is turned backwards and represented in the making of the map. In line with Collins, who considers "filmic comprehension as problem-solving activity",²¹⁴ the structure of *Filling the Gaps* encourages the spectator to assess their own subjective position in relation to the film's enunciated and signified meanings. Here the determining factors will be their own knowledge and the particular reading they make when filling gaps. This idea of filling knowledge gaps can be applied in many ways: Dürer filled in gaps in his knowledge to complete the engraving; the collaborators may rely on their imagination to fill in their

knowledge gaps about Morocco; Bartrum fills in our gaps of knowledge about Dürer's methods; and for collaborators the film provides images to fill in their gaps about Morocco. Finally, only by imaginatively filling in the gaps of information between them can the two stories in the film be related. The development of parallel ideas that collide to explore the film's possible meanings could also be compared to cognitivist strategies for generating creative thoughts or creative solutions. On these lines, the film could be thought of as a *geneplore* proposition (generate and explore), where ideas are suggested for exploration of possible links between them, which might generate original thoughts.

Following the analysis of ideas generated, the film makes tourists of its collaborators and spectators, in this case touring their imagination for media memories or comments heard about Morocco. Responses to the film via Internet feedback revealed how some viewers internalised the idea of making assumptions in order to connect thoughts. This was expressed in some responses as the anticipation of travel and a holiday, imagining or daydreaming about the possibilities of adventure, discovery or experience, in contrast with everyday life. This is not a dissimilar interpretation to that of the film's collaborators asked to imagine Morocco with nothing but memories of references acquired in the past. The responses I find more satisfying are feedback recognising how viewers, in other instances of their lives, connect thoughts and memories through imagination, as *Filling the Gaps* suggests. What I find most significant in such feedback is the engagement with the film's

underlying theme and the response to the encouragement of creative thinking through associative ideation the film proposes. Overall, the feedback points at a realisation of the film's premise, a reflection on the use of imagination in documentary filmmaking and its unavoidable intervention and contribution in coding and decoding films. The key idea is the consideration of imagination and creativity as decisive components in documentary films. The film portrays a remediation through imagination, memorised media instances regrouped to fit a description, filling in for an absence.

Loulabelle's Café

The third film is *Loulabelle's Café*. This film places the spectator in the scene of a mobile roadside café frequented by workmen and women. The idea behind its production was to enforce a great number of constraints, including attempting to maximise spectator creative interpretation and agency, minimise intervention, avoid the use of narration, restrict recording to the café's location, gather information from commentary and the organic unfolding of events, avoid interviews or questioning, and record in an observational mode. Additionally, there were influencing constraints germane to documentaries: issues of access, ethics, economics and form. The negotiation of the latter is also a creative motivator for the films presented. According to cognitivists, when striving for creativity there are no fruitless efforts, only different categories of ambition and achievement. I am reasonably satisfied with the results of the film and its final form, which shows how it has been shaped by many influential 'actors',

including in terms of creative input and the introduction of obstructions. As a creative project it started with high aims, not least in the ambition of its numerous constraints. It could be said it achieved these in some aspects. Maybe the clearest of these achievements – the revelation about the influence of the set of constraints – was unforeseen, although when looked at in hindsight it might seem surprising and naive to not have anticipated the predictable results: that by imposing many constraints on the production it was forced into a creative system with similarities to Direct Cinema documentary. As a creative experiment, *Loulabelle's Café*, instead of leading to newer or refreshed formal arrangements, ultimately served to recreate known forms, maybe hinting at how such forms were originally inspired, i.e. by the early directors of Cinema Verité, and became so successful and influential. The film exemplifies the relationship between constraint, creative input and resulting form.

It shares creative constraints with the other films in the submission, but the circumstances surrounding the film contribute to its constraining: theme and later location were deliberately chosen for their difficulties, forcing a thinking-through of solutions or acknowledgement of the inevitability of their influence. To put this in perspective, it is necessary to look into the film's subject and its circumstances. My interest in places like mobile kitchens and hamburger vans goes back to past photographic reportage and portraits of their often characterful owners. They usually trade from converted trailers or caravans with minimal cooking facilities, offering limited services to motorists including sandwiches and hot and cold beverages. Usually they are parked in laybys near

busy routes or crossings. Competition among them and the rules of organisation tend to be self-imposed and regulated. Road chefs do not own their trading locations but location occupancies are respected by other traders. They make arrangements to sub-let their places when on holiday or allow in other traders looking for a site in periods of absence. Sometimes site 'rights' are sold for significant amounts of money. The bulk of clients are drivers and their passengers who frequent the routes they flank. Some vendors have traded from the same spot for years, others last only a few weeks. Their ephemerality, casualness, use of language and diverse human mix fascinated me. They are very complicated places to take photos of, let alone record video; as a subject they pose every difficulty possible: proximity to the road, unpredictable custom patterns, traffic of people in front of camera, impact of weather and noise, among others. These complications, many of which are customary constraints of documentary, were accepted as natural constraints on this production.

As part of the constraints, this film was not researched but designed on the basis of previous knowledge accumulated from earlier projects. Similarly, subject, location and collaborators were not chosen but were serendipitous. Its theme, story, protagonists and forms were deliberately left to chance, to be found and developed as the unplanned production progressed. The experiment can be identified with trial and error processes, or more accurately with creatively responding to chance, in contrasts with the precise design of the two films preceding. In searching for a suitable location I avoided places I knew. After determining an area, I asked burger van and café owners if they would

entertain the idea of allowing me to film a documentary about the life of their business. The first to warm to the idea and grant permission was Louisa, the owner of Loulabelle's Café. I did not know at that time what the film would become as I could not foresee what to expect. The film could have turned out to be a portrait of places or customers, or about the difficulties of making a film under these circumstances. It was part of the design to allow it to develop organically, and I relied on experience to overcome difficulties. The point of this was to allow circumstances and impediments to influence the results.

Loulabelle's Café is 'a unit' in the trade's jargon, a repurposed shipping container planted by the access road to an industrial state. It has electricity but no running water. The facilities inside are restricted to gas cooking, bottled water supply and a small sitting area. Overall, it is better equipped than most burger vans. After a conversation with Louisa about the motivations for the film she agreed to allow me to join her and her crew to make a film about the day-to-day life of the café.

Access, including permissions, has a profound influence on documentary and is a seldom-discussed influencing factor. With access permission and permission from the café's two cooks, the next problem I needed to solve was obtaining permission from the café's customers, who would likely feature in the film. The first setting idea was to place two sports cameras above the counter area, each recording one side of the encounter with customers, together with a microphone recording their conversations. To put such a rig in place, every person

approaching the bar needed to be previously informed that there were cameras recording, which proved logistically very difficult (especially working alone). This rig was designed for working on smaller burger vans, where only a small number of customers can approach the counter at once. It turned out to be impractical at Louisa's café where groups of up to six customers would turn up at once, among which there could be someone who would rather not be part of the recording. The second idea was to use a sports camera to film the kitchen area from above the bar, where it would not record anyone not part of the kitchen staff, with a digital cinema camera conspicuously placed facing the bar where it would only record the backs of people, if at all, while Louisa and crew attended them. In this way recording was made conspicuous, avoiding any suspicion of secretive recording. Other complications had to be dealt with on an ad-hoc basis. This included the presence of Carla, the young kitchen helper who because of her age I considered ethically should not be included in the film. Her presence forced modifications to shooting schedules and the need to shoot around her presence in the kitchen.

Keen to see the film made, and aware of the issues related to customers and Carla, Louisa contributed by collecting emails from all those who gave permission. Most regular customers did, with few exceptions. However, the email collection turned out to be pointless because correspondence between emails and actual persons filmed and on screen could not be verified. Despite having collected dozens of permissions to record from many of the regulars, who eventually got used to the camera's presence, the largest part of more than

400 takes, including members of the public, were checked for clearance but had to be dismissed, since I was unsure whether consent had been granted by all in view. Constraints arising from shooting alone or from shooting in a public place can be thought of as self-imposed constraints. The conspicuous presence of crew and cameras on a subject's behaviour has been discussed at length in documentary criticism. Piotrowska notes "the anxiety of the film's 'contributor' [...] of being transformed into an object of the gaze of the other".²¹⁵ At the café, Louisa, Madeleine and Jane were exceptionally kind in allowing such access, but there were many instances when they asked me to stop recording, which were duly respected.

The film also uses other resources to aid anonymity, like blurring vehicle number plates and signs or selective blurring of takes. Aware of the problems I was going to face I made several attempts to include members of the public anonymously. One such attempt can be seen in the file named 'transition sequences.mov' included in the 'Digital Files' appendix. This particular attempt tried to make use of available technology, over-imposing footage in time, layered to create a representation of the café's busy times but rendering individuals other than the main film characters as a ghostly presence and thus unrecognisable. These were intended to be used as transition sections in the film; ultimately the decision was made not to use them and to respect the self-imposed constraint of minimising intervention.

The location and logistics forced some other formal decisions, like having to dispense with the use of tripods and working most of the time in low light, provided by low wattage fluorescent lights. It was difficult to manoeuvre a camera in the small space even on a shoulder rig, which caused sound recording difficulties. The camera was equipped with a gun-microphone recording in one of the camera's two channels, and a radio microphone on Louisa recorded her conversations.

Sound recording was further complicated by ambient noise in this small space and the presence of a radio permanently playing. Recordings with a radio programme or music can be included if the excerpts are very short or unrecognisable. A large number of takes also had to be discarded for defective sound or un-cleared content base. What has to be left out might have turned out to be more defining than what is included. The true significance of this can be evaluated through what is left out of a production, which in normal circumstances can only be analysed with difficulty, and casts a question mark over documentary modes that involve recording spontaneity.

My film portraits deal with the quotidian, and are not made in a spirit of controversy; they rather strive to allow participants their own voice, to tell their stories, to the extent that is possible, in the ways they choose. Still, the best of intentions and approaches need to negotiate complex moral mazes; e.g. the cooks' decision to grant permission might have been swayed by Louisa's enthusiasm to have a film made about her and the café. Deliberately

unplanned, there was no way to predict what I would find, and therefore which aspects of the protagonist's lives would finally be portrayed. Authorial control is exercised, unavoidably, in every choice and decision, and in deciding what to include and what to leave out, what was useful to build up the film story, and what should be left out on ethical or creative grounds. Perhaps other filmmakers would have been attracted by the possible benefits of raising controversy and made other choices. There have been many high-profile instances of disagreements between subjects, production and filmmakers after film releases.²¹⁶ Documentaries often tell difficult stories and court controversy, nearly always at someone's expense.²¹⁷ On reflection and after the experiences I lived during making the documentaries and in particular during the recording of *Lullabelle's Café*, documentary ethics are also negotiated, forcing the filmmaker to make choices with implications for collaborators. These can involve, among many other, discarding testimonies or storylines because of the implications their publication might have on the subjects and remain careful not to allow a film's aims or its forms distort contributions resulting in misrepresentations. These challenges could be argued to be forms of self-imposed constraints accepted when making documentary films.

Other constraints imposed on the film were avoiding set interviews, around which many documentaries are built. I attempted to record events with minimal intervention; I also avoided voice-over narration so as not to lead to any intended meanings. For comparison and contextualisation, I later interviewed Louisa in order to have a frame for the actuality and events, for a film edited

around the interview that could be used for comparison. The alternative edit using unused footage is included in the digital appendix, named *In Louisa's Own Words*. As the title suggests, in this short Louisa tells the stories experienced during filming at the café and reflects on the impact filming had on the daily life of her business, explaining how she benefited of my presence, and the film, for publicity. The difference I would underline between the two films are the relative ease in making a film around an interview in contrast to chasing a film out of observed events. Editing around an interview easily leads to illustration scenes to cut away from talking heads, although not necessarily. (It must be considered here that the second film was produced for comparison and, possibly, its creativity suffered as a result.) Yet what can be underlined of both approaches is the same need for selective editing and construction, whether previously planned or unplanned.

In breach of the imposed constraints of minimal intervention and avoiding formal interview, Andrew, an ex-media man turned gardener, was also interviewed at the Wateringbury marina, albeit reluctantly on my part – one more of the broken self-imposed constraints. For reasons that are unclear, circumstances had not given rise to the kind of spontaneous exchanges with the camera that had occurred with other protagonists. What he told me was already known to the café's crew and to me, so I can only suspect that he wanted to be portrayed in a different setting and manner. In the pleasant grounds of the marina, his demeanour was not that of the incisive and entertaining character he presented at the café but of a reflective, cultivated personality, with wide life experiences.

The most significant development for the film was the character of the available pool of shots to select from and determine theme, character and weave the film's narrative. The film design did not establish criteria to follow purposefully, the film's issues and their approach were found in the development of events and are a combination of feasibility and convenience to a possible storyline. These were assembled in the editing room. Factors include whether enough material to build a story thread has been captured, what the captured material does or adds to the existing dialogue, or how they portray their involved characters, influenced authorial selection. Notably, regarding the last suggestion, it would be mistaken to assume that the filmmaker's criteria only leave out what is inconvenient to the story, or use all that is convenient, as issues of ethics and representation play a part in selection.

Previous knowledge acquired making photo reportage of mobile roadside kitchens allowed me to anticipate areas of possible development, and it was only timing and chance that afforded opportunities to record some of these. Unfolding events I chanced to record suggested possible narrative threads, like the fierce competition between chefs, reflected in Louisa's belief that the vandalism she was suffering was likely to be premeditated, caused by her café's success; another was her problems dealing with council regulations enforced on mobile businesses. Other possible narrative threads, like the underlying economics of the business, diet and health were put to one side. Other social issues related to class and gender were made evident. Louisa's all-

women crew serve a predominantly male clientele, a seemingly gendered segregation each side of the café counter. It is also clear that Louisa uses this circumstance to advantage as she describes in the film. The film tries to reflect this whilst remaining neutral about it, if neutrality is possible; this neutrality is expressed by avoidance rather than intervention and part of the creative input mobilises the search for optimal ways in the negotiation of potentially delicate issues. Such instances can be telling of a collaborator but can also distort how is perceived. Leaving things out can betray a character portray as much as their overuse can distort it. It also impoverishes creativity. Unintentional overuse might lead to judgemental interpretation. An example of this dilemma arises with Louisa's many comments and gestures in asides to camera, comical and playful, that had to be considered for inclusion in the edit, forcing an estimation about how best to portray Louisa's Loulabelle character. In the interview in "*On Louisa's Own Words*" Louisa confesses to dreams of fame and her liking of artistic performance. It must be stressed that all issues arising in the length of time of a recording like *Loulabelle's Café* cannot be addressed; their avoidance is implemented creatively. Editing forces an unavoidable creative selection of themes and issues.

It is in contrast with the social circumstances that the sequences of the young girl who introduces each character were intended, the only part of the ideation design that precede the film, other than the decision to make a film about roadside cafés. They are fictional, scripted, acted and deliberately introduced in the narrative. This might not be obvious for the viewer, but no link between her

and the rest of the film is given. Her appearances are the only ones underlined with music, shot on a fixed camera and in controlled lighting in slow paced, long cuts to create a contrast between their cinematic style and the rest of the handheld footage more habitually associated with documentary films. Other than providing a device for character introductions and films aesthetics, their intention is to provoke idea associations and to challenge ideas of documentary linking to daydream, imagination and practices more easily identified with fiction film production. As intended and recalled by viewers approached for comment, the documentary is understood as a figure of her imagination, and in its irony this hints at the issues that might await her as she enters adulthood and the world of work, and experiences the labyrinths of gender and class. But this is only one of many possible responses. The sequence is introduced with the same overall provocative intent, to encourage the spectator to make their own connections and to provoke reflection about documentary. This prompts questioning about whether this is possible or if it belongs to the “discourse of jouissances”,²¹⁸ the universe Renov speaks of, the unconscious desires of the author projected over the film’s aspirations.

The film has the form of what can be identified, considering Arthur’s simple description, as a documentary, although it was intended, suggested by the narrative and interpreted by some in the film’s feedback, as the teenager’s daydreamed thoughts about possible lives. It is by design that the film playfully suggests the documentary’s actuality as her internalised reflection. Her daydreaming has the form of a documentary. Paradoxically, the daydreamed

story is a documentary, and the daydreaming, or more accurately its suggested representation, a fiction. Whether the film achieves this logical swap in assigning documentary, fiction, daydream and reality is up to the spectator's interpretation. Interpreting the film as the girl's dreams it is not an essential reading but an avenue to another layer in possible readings and a hint at the blurred boundaries between film, fiction and documentary. A written narrative voice-over for the young actress's scenes was considered, making clear the film's suggestion, but was discarded, given the constraint of minimal intervention and ceding agency to the viewer. This underlines the dependence on the filmmaker's creative judgement in choosing between following a constraint or choosing to break it in creative license. In the interaction between dependence and judgement can be seen the idea of documentary as negotiation, as calculated choices with deep formal repercussions in portraying reality.

Loulabelle's Café shows that the burden of constraints leads to a particular form of production. The choice of constraints must be pondered carefully when being considered as a means to creative results. It may place unrealistic demands on the medium and the filmmaker, or propose expectations that, in their difficulty or impossibility, are ultimately broken. *Loulabelle's Café* shares a problematic with Direct Cinema and Verité films: just as their directors abandoned their self-imposed constraints, so did I. As an experiment there is much that can be learnt here and put in practice in future attempts. The film succeeds in evidencing the influence of constraints, which was its objective, highlighting the

correspondences between ideas and decisions, the forms of negotiation of the complex mix of circumstances and the film's formal outcome. *Loulabelle's Café* is my first purely observed film. Among other findings it has shown me the complications of such documentaries and made me realise I am more comfortable using scripting and being able to choose from a wide range of filmic resources. Paradoxically, like so many things about documentary, making *Loulabelle's Café* showed me that seeking to cede authorial control easily results in further elaboration of a documentary's construction

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, creative development has been considered in two ways, conceptually and in practice, and through the adoption of three distinctive approaches: firstly cognitive studies, providing a vocabulary and a framework for creative encouraging, understanding and analysis; secondly, documentary theory and criticism, with particular attention to expectations, problematisation and creative strategies of significant influence in my practice; and thirdly through a shift in perspective, contemplating the problematic and practice of documentary as constraints to better define and evidence the challenges the documentarists accept and negotiate creatively.

Notwithstanding research limitations, documentaries can be defended as ideas articulated creatively. What cognitive science studies provide, which humanities-based ideas of creativity directly pertaining to documentary filmmaking have seldom addressed directly, is an independent approach to creative input. I have put certain cognitive science and psychology ideas into practice, in the making of the accompanying films and in their analysis. They have facilitated discussion of ideas and creative input, and their relationship with film forms. This can be seen in the approach to the three films, in particular *Filling the Gaps* and its discussion, a film that delves into ideas about the need for imagination and exposes them in sympathy with Cognitivists suggestions of ideas contiguity and creative exploration of a knowledge domain.

Just as there has been a process of demystification of creativity, there is a demystification of documentary, best represented in the ideas proposed by authors like Bruzzi, Arthur or Ward, that see documentary as a dynamic practice resulting from the negotiation between representation and reality. Critically, as I have discussed and put in practice in making documentary films, this negotiation is enacted creatively. I regard creative input as essential to documentary filmmaking and encourage the interpretation of documentary as a creative practice. Analysing a documentary's creative input, as I have done in this thesis with my own films and via renowned examples of the practice, helps make more evident the singularities of and intervention of creativity in documentary making. The documentary filmmaker adopts particular approaches and forms to accommodate audiences' expectations. Signalling these as constraints helps frame documentary practice.

Specific to this thesis are the abstraction of concepts surrounding documentary film and representation using Elster and Elsaesser's ideas of creative constraints. Constraints are proposed as necessary and fundamental to creative development by cognitivists, pragmatic semioticians and literary critics alike. The identification of areas of difficulty or complication in the production of documentaries or in negotiating representations of the real helps in focusing their challenge creatively. Creative constraints are those the author chooses for their particular engagement, and their choice and combination determine a film's final forms. For cognitivists, constraints are necessary as a frame to creative thinking. To Elster and Elsaesser, creative constraints assert authorial

control, frame artists' creative challenges and structure authors' subversion, motivating creative response, original expression and approaches in their challenge. I have briefly discussed the types of constraint, among which stand out self-imposed creative constraints for their value as frames to problem solving (or problem finding). Acknowledging and identifying constraints focuses the creative effort while encouraging realistic expectations about their challenge. Particular choices of constraints reflect the author's intentions, and determine the character of a film's treatment of its subject, i.e. fictional, fictionalised, as documentary or other. In the discussion I suggested that it is in the acceptance of constraints aimed at fulfilling the commitments of the filmmaker towards their audience that a film production becomes a documentary production, and that documentaries are films where filmmaker and spectator share implicit knowledge about constraints.

I elaborated on creative motivation through constraints and documentary in some historical instances as well as in my films. My analytical approach looks to problems with documentary film in terms of constraints and creative negotiations in response. As examples, I looked into how creative input shapes the author's representational strategy in Direct Cinema and in the performative documentaries of Broomfield and Dineen. Creative analysis of documentary films is intended as a complement to existing analysis.

Looking at documentary as creative challenges, as I argued in Chapter Three, helps clarify its differentiation from other film modes, and accommodates the

wide latitude of forms documentaries can take. Such latitude suggests possible approaches and outcomes are only limited by creative ability and imagination in the challenge of representational constraints, furthering scepticism about the existence of any ‘ideal’ documentary.

As part of the research I produced three films in consideration of the ideas here exposed and with particular creative constraints. The first, *Mechanising the Catch*, is an exercise in problem finding and solving. Encouraged by predetermined constraints, the documentary took the form of an i-doc, a database interactive documentary. The experiment tests micro-documentaries’ (Vines) and social media video vehicles’ usefulness to documentary practice. Forcing a documentary into Vine required reflection about what is understood as documentary and stripping this notion to the bare minimum in order to produce six-second documentaries, or closer approximations, and look to the effect on its resulting forms. Further experiments will have to focus the exploration into story and discourse to further involve the spectator, modifying its constraints and their influence, allowing for deeper empathic development. In other words, to produce a documentary where issues of human interest weight more on its final form, rather than its particular format. Ultimately, this film, as well as the other two in this thesis, intends to encourage reflection, highlighting their construction to hint at documentary as a creative practice. They intend to make the spectator more aware of their nature principally as films, as noted by Brylla, about documentary as a fiction, albeit “a fiction (un)like any other”,²¹⁹ an interpreted construction of the real.

Of the three films submitted, *Filling the Gaps* is probably the most personal and the one that best reflects my ambitions as a filmmaker. Having worked in media since my teens, it reflects my interest in understanding and playfully using media. The film represents what I like in films, what I would like my films to become, and my efforts to improve my practice in sharing ideas, questioning media and reflecting on these ideas in complicity with audiences. The film takes advantage of cognitivists' ideas about ideation contiguity, putting them in practice through its narrative development.

Loulabelle's Café is an observational film, a creative strategy prompted by the limitations imposed on its development. It plays with the documentary film mode, portraying a documentary as the daydreams of a fictional subject. The objective of this is to indirectly highlight documentary conceptions and construction and to share this, as far as possible, with the spectator. This aim is shared with the two other films.

Looking into the causes and motivations of forms evident in a film suggests issues concerning their originality, suitability and agility in overcoming the shortcomings of film mediation in regards to representing reality. Understood this way documentary films can be seen as a creative challenge to sets of constraints considered by their authors. Then, it could be said that documentary film is defined by its constraints.

The films also represent the hope of making more films with better means, in collaboration with other creatives and extended crews, sharing and encouraging creativity with them to reach wider audiences. A logical progression for future projects will be to follow the same methods but attempt more complex films made with a crew and creative partners. This could see some of the ideas I was unable to produce on my own made, with the collaboration of the films' subjects, and the extension of creative input to the teams. This will not only allow analysis of creative input but also comparison with films made by a sole creative filmmaker.

This thesis has attempted to re-focus attention on creativity in documentary, accepting it as fundamental to the practice and celebrating the practice for its creative solutions to bringing spectators specific negotiations of the real.

Word count 38.300

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The house on 92nd st. Directed by H Hathaway. Film. USA 1945
The lie of the land. Directed by Molly Dineen. Film. UK 2007
The lider, his driver, and the driver's wife. Directed by Nick Broomfield. Film. UK 1991
The Look of Silence. Directed by Joshua Oppenheimer. Film. USA 2015
The Moo Man. Directed by Heathcote, A. Film. UK 2012
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The Tree of Life. Directed by Malic, T. Film. USA 2011
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Titicut Follies. Directed by Frederick Wiseman. Film. USA 1967
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Viridiana. Directed by Luis Buñuel. Film. Spain 1961
Waiting for Gruffman. Directed by Crhistopher Guest. Film. USA 1996
Waltz with Bashir. Directed by Ari Folman. Film. Israel 2008
Waste Land. Directed by L Walker, K, Hurley. Film. UK'Brasil 2011
What Farocki Taught. Directed by Jill Godmillow. Film. USA 1998
Wild Strawberries. Directed by Ingmar Bergman. Film. Sewden 1957
Word is out: Stories of Some of Our Lives. Directed by Peter Adair and the Mariposa Film Group. Film. USA 1977
Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory. Directed by Auguste and Louis Lumière. Film. France, 1895
Zelig, Directed by Woody Allen. Film. USA 1983

Appendix

Introduction to the practice part of the thesis

Brief blurbs for the submission's films and their appendices

Five films comprise the submission, three of which, *Mechanising the Catch*, *Filling the Gaps* and *Loulabelle's Café* are the main body of the thesis and two where created as alternatives for comparison and included in the appendix. These two are *La Lonja*, which is a very simple linear edit of the material recorded for *Mechanising the Catch* and *In Louisa's Own Words*, an edit of material similar but not used on its sister film, *Loulabelle's Café*. *In Louisa's Own Words* is edited around an interview with Louisa, Lulabelle in the precedent film, that was recorded after filming at the café was over. In the film Louisa tells us about her experience of the film process. Following are their succinct descriptions and links to their location on the internet for viewing.

Note: Should the website ask for a password for viewing, the password is: Fernando.

Mechanising the Catch

Mechanising the Catch is an experiment in documentary, making use of social media, submitting to the constraints this imposes to distort the idea of documentary. It is composed of a series of Vine.co videos that are restricted to a length of six seconds and presented without any order or navigation to indicate beginning, middle, end or narrative thread. It is a reflexive documentary exercise challenging the limits of the documentary film form. It has an accompanying short documentary film titled *La Lonja*, in which the same production and footage has been turned into a comparatively standard observational, expository documentary.

<https://vine.co/u/1040243376370397184?mode=grid>

Filling the Gaps

Filling the Gaps is a film about creativity and documentary. It explores media documents and the creative leaps necessary to connect those instances that are presented to us as facts. It centres around the conception of Albrecht Dürer's 1515 engraving *The Rhinoceros*, a representation of an animal considered mythical at the time and one that Dürer, like most of his contemporaries, never had the opportunity to see in the flesh. The film invites reflection on the way we fill in knowledge gaps to connect thoughts, make assumptions about received information, and journey to places of the

imagination. Join in this journey, fill a few gaps yourself, or just admire Dürer for his masterful creative drive.

<https://vimeo.com/fernand/fillinggaps>

Loulabelle's Café

A documentary to watch with a cup of builder's tea, preferably in a Styrofoam cup. An observational film about a roadside café where sandwiches are seasoned with more than salt and pepper. *Loulabelle's Café* witnesses the life of Loula's luncheon and its all-female crew serving eggs, bacon and sausage sandwiches seasoned with genuine human care. Maybe not what you expect from a greasy spoon for workmen and women. A reflexive documentary film that, behind its story, questions who makes the documentaries, the filmmakers or the viewer's imagination?

<https://vimeo.com/fernand/loulabellecafe>

In Louisa's Own Words

In Louisa's Own Words is the companion film to *Loulabelle's Café*, edited with footage not used in its sister film and built around an interview with Loulabelle's Café owner Louisa, conducted after filming ceased at the café. Louisa tells us stories we never heard in *Loulabelle's Café* and candidly elaborates on the impact the presence of cameras and the documentarist had on the café's daily life. The film underlines the contrast in approaches to documentary filmmaking between the observational *Loulabelle's Café* and *In Louisa's Own Words*. To enhance this contrast, you are allowed Earl Grey and china cups while watching *In Louisa's Own Words*.

<https://vimeo.com/fernand/inlousaswords>

La Lonja

La Lonja represents a clash between romanticism and technology seen from a fixed nostalgic perspective while highlighting the practical convenience of the new. *La Lonja*, named for the Spanish term for a port's fish market, documents the transition between the old-style voice-called auctions at the port of Peñíscola and new automated ones after the introduction of mechanisation and digitisation. It at once celebrates the old auctions for their craft and beauty, and hears the Lonja's workmen praise the convenient, less laborious tech-assisted newer ones.

<https://vimeo.com/fernand/lalonja>

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